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K.H. Adler, *Jews and Gender in Liberation France*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xii + 273pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$60.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 0-521-79048-4.

Review by Maud Mandel, Brown University.

For observers of minority politics in France, the recent reemergence of the *foulard* question has a certain *plus ça change* quality to it. Indeed, the relative frequency with which debates over universalism versus particularism seem to resurface in French political life is striking. After several years of some experimentation with American-style notions of multiculturalism, it seems as if the French republic's commitment to assimilation as the primary means through which to incorporate foreign minorities into the state has reasserted itself with a vengeance.

As historians of immigration, decolonization, and ethnic minorities in France are well aware, this commitment to republican assimilation has a long history, dating back as far as the origins of the republic itself when statesmen debated the place of Jews in the new nation. Then, as now, the hope was to limit visible manifestations of minority affiliation as a means of controlling the boundaries of French citizenship. Jews were eventually welcomed and awarded citizenship in the new nation but only if they first sublimated their ethnic commitments to the will of the state. Indeed, as Ronald Schechter has recently told us, despite the fact that Jews were only a tiny minority of the French population, debates around their inclusion (or exclusion) were central to the founding of the nation. Thus assimilation and national identity became inextricably linked at the very birth of the state.[1]

As K.H. Adler's *Jews and Gender in Liberation France* documents, this commitment to assimilationist politics remained deeply entrenched in the republican nation, even at its moment of greatest crisis, the rise and fall of Vichy France. To tell this story, she looks at the refounding of the republic in the aftermath of World War II, at a moment when policies of exclusion were explicitly being rejected by those seeking to put the memory of Vichy behind them. By using the prism of race-in particular, Jewishness-and gender, however, Adler documents the ways in which exclusionist policies remained central both to the resistance movement during the war and to the policies of the new republic once Vichy had collapsed. Following recent scholarship, such as Gérard Noiriel's *Les Origines républicaines de Vichy*, which documents the continuities linking the seemingly disparate interwar French government and its Vichy successor, Adler challenges a neat narrative that reads Vichy as standing apart from the regimes that preceded and followed it.[2] By focusing on questions of race, ethnicity, and gender, however, she not only traces the profound ways in which discrimination--so central to the Vichy state--also shaped the rhetoric and policies of resisters and postwar political actors "in ways that Vichy and its adherents would certainly have recognized" (p. 178), but she also reminds us that assimilationist politics were inherently gendered, working to essentialize broad categories of the population not only by nationality and ethnicity, but by sex.

Vichy's discriminatory policies are, of course, well known. Antisemitic, anti-foreign, and pro-natalist, the wartime government prioritized the heterosexual, Catholic, family and elevated the status of motherhood. Much divided this government from its successors, particularly notions of religion and of the inherent value of republicanism. But, as Adler aptly shows, there are strong interconnections between these differing regimes as well. Indeed, according to her analysis, long before Vichy fell, the resistance movement, which set itself up in opposition to all that Vichy stood for, articulated a relationship to gender and foreignness that echoed images propagated by the Pétainist regime. By examining the clandestine press, and particularly the women's resistance press, she convincingly documents the ways in which discourses on women, the family, and "national outsiders" overlapped with rhetoric from Vichy officials. For both, women's maternalism and familialism was viewed as innate and central to French femininity. And for both, a foreign menace (Jews and immigrants according to Pétainists, Germans according to the resistance press) threatened the integrity of the French family, embodied in its women. Thus, for both divisions between "French" and "foreign" were posed as absolute binaries, and for both French women and the French family were an essential barrier against the forces of evil.

Central to Adler's argument, and by far the best feature of her book, is her investigation of shared populationist instincts that guided Vichy officials and their postwar successors in very similar ways. Fears that France was underpopulated arose repeatedly throughout twentieth-century French political history. As Adler rightly points out, the fact that France was underpopulated was accepted across the political spectrum during and after World War II. A commitment to solving this problem was of central importance to de Gaulle's administration, as is evident in a series of laws passed between 1945 and 1947 designed to strengthen the family and encourage French birth rates. Provisions for the family included, among other things, payments for expectant and neo-natal mothers and measures to counter infant mortality and abortion. However, as Adler indicates "populationism after war actually consisted of a dual vision for national revival: an increase in the birth rate and an increase in immigration. Together, these would provide the framework on which the new republic could be built" (p. 69).

In two expertly argued chapters, Adler shows the way in which a focus on the French family and on mothers as the hope for the future of the French state was inherently linked to an aggressive immigration policy that sought to repopulate France with the "right" kind of immigrants. Indeed, it is somewhat shocking to see the way in which racist discourses of cultural difference reasserted themselves in postwar naturalization and immigration laws despite the recent history of Vichy exclusion. Moreover, while all explicitly antisemitic bigotry had disappeared from French immigration policies once the Vichy regime had toppled, Adler points out an ongoing dislike for shopkeepers (read Jewish) topping the list of "undesirable" qualities for incoming immigrants. While her evidence is somewhat shaky here, since she has no concrete proof that antisemitism remained a significant part of postwar populationist discourse and, indeed, other indicators suggest that Jews were able to reenter French society with relative ease, Adler does a stellar job showing how a handful of well-placed demographers and populationists, some notable anti-semites among them, managed to find a place for themselves in the Third Republic, the Vichy regime, and again in the postwar government, advising de Gaulle's administration on the most beneficial ways to bolster France's population. It is here that Adler is best able to demonstrate the links at the nexus of her book--the "dual interplay of race and gender within assimilationist discourses and ways that they would help to define a new, liberated republic after occupation" (p. 11).

In her final chapter, Adler examines the impact of this assimilatory project on those who had been its main targets, Jewish immigrant women from Paris. By focusing on this doubly ostracized population, she questions whether the image of unmitigated joy associated with the liberation of Paris, which she labels as masculine and non-Jewish, was shared by all sectors of the population. While clearly overjoyed to see the Germans fall, the women Adler interviewed could not put aside the role their French neighbors had played in their plight. For them, the Parisian streets were not a safe and joyous space but a dangerous reminder of their painful past. These recollections, coupled with the fact that streets have traditionally been coded as dangerous for women, makes Adler skeptical of the homogenous image of liberated Parisian streets that has dominated popular memory. Moreover, and perhaps even more importantly, the complex picture these survivors provide of their relationship to France, national identity, and Jewishness reminds us that for escapees of the Holocaust, "Frenchness" was an ambivalent category. The ambivalence comes through particularly clearly in a fascinating discussion of memories of the French police, the institution most associated with Jewish deportation. While on the one hand, most Jews feared and detested the police, many of the survivors interviewed in Adler's book owed their lives to a warning of a round-up that they had received from a French policeman. As Adler comments: "The grudging gratitude present in these accounts coheres with their teller's ambivalent reclamation of French identity and its attendant administrative structures as their own" (p. 161). Nevertheless, it is also clear from Adler's evidence that while the national assimilationist project may have been paramount to postwar demographers, populationists, and government officials, Jewish survivors saw their "Frenchness" as highly mutable. Indeed, "[e]ach of these women encompasses the fractured sense of self that Jacobin universalism would deny but that remains paradoxically widespread within the Republic" (p. 165).

As these excerpts suggest, there is much to praise in this ambitious book. Most significantly, Adler does a nice job showing the rhetorical and practical links between Vichy and the postwar regime, underscoring how fear of the foreigner and gendered notions of the French woman were central to both. While we have always known that discourses of exclusion made up the heart of the Vichy regime, Adler clearly demonstrates that its demise did not necessarily lead to a rejection of all that it stood for despite protestations to the contrary. Her analysis helps explain why, although the issue of women's equality began to emerge in the postwar years, most notably with the winning of the franchise, women's role in the family changed very little and why the broader feminist movement had only modest successes.

Also important is Adler's rereading of racist discourses in France in which she argues that populationists' explicit rejection of the biological basis of exclusion masked an equally harsh reading of cultural and national difference. As she proves through a close reading of a variety of populationist writings, an emphasis on immutable cultural traits among ethnic and national groups displayed a similar kind of aversion to difference reflected in the most radical racist discourses of the twentieth century. Her conclusions here suggest that histories of twentieth-century French racism need to rethink the distinctions often articulated between biological and cultural bigotry.

It is also worth noting Adler's thoughtful and persuasive defense of oral history, particularly in the study of Holocaust victims. Criticizing those who reject oral sources for their inaccuracy, Adler demonstrates the significance of survivor testimony in capturing the diversity of human experience and the complexity of human memory. In a telling example of recollections about the Hotel Lutétia, the first stop for most deportees on their reintegration into France, for example, Adler shows how one survivor "inaccurately" remembered the over-crowded, chaotic, and understaffed welcome center as a "marvel" (p. 172). As Adler convincingly argues, this faulty memory need not be rejected as inaccurate but rather should tell us something about the contrast between where the survivor had spent the previous few years--in a series of concentration camps--and where she had arrived. For her, France was a welcome refuge after years of suffering.

In some ways, however, the greatest strengths of this book are also its greatest weakness. That is to say, *Jews and Gender in Liberation France* is an ambitious book that takes on a number of large historiographical questions and, as such, does not always remain focused on a set of central questions. It adopts a variety of modes of inquiry--oral history, close analysis of a few key populationist writings, broad readings of the resistance press, to name a few--and in doing so, often comes to suggestive conclusions that are not always thoroughly substantiated. Put in different terms, the breadth of the book sometimes challenges its depth. This comes through most clearly when one considers the title, *Jews and Gender in Liberation France*. Actually, the text is both broader and narrower than the title suggests. For the most part, it is not, in fact, about Jews as such but rather about Jews as symbols of national outsiders across the prewar, Vichy, and liberation eras. While the last chapter begins to tell us something about how Jews responded to these images and made homes for themselves in liberated France, it is necessarily more suggestive than it is definitive, since it is based on a handful of interviews with Polish Jewish women. Although the book also tries to tell us something about native French Jewish women, this analysis is less convincing, since the discussion is essentially based on an analysis of the war diaries of one woman. Similarly, while the title asserts that the text is about gender, in fact, it is largely about women and does not speak much about how postwar reconstructions of gender and the family affected French or immigrant men.

And yet, as I suggested, the text is also broader than the title implies. Adler is interested in far more than the few years following liberation. Her chronological scope is much wider, which helps us make sense of how a deeply divided society was able to come together relatively easily after so much disruption and upheaval. Shared assumptions about race, gender, the family, and assimilation, Adler proves, brought people together across the political spectrum at a moment when French identity had become fractured for many. Her conclusions on this front provide a compelling rereading of the postwar years and help explain how the seemingly profound disjunctures of modern French political life were more cohesive than initial readings suggest.

NOTES

[1] Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[2] Gérard Noiriel, *Les Origines républicaines de Vichy* (Paris: Hachette, 1999).

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