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David Caron, *My Father & I: The Marais & the Queerness of Community*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009. x + 264 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8014-4773-0.

Review by William A. Peniston, The Newark Museum.

The Marais is a neighborhood in the third and fourth arrondissements of Paris. Originally, it was a modest settlement on the right bank of the Seine around the churches of St. Gervais and St. Paul. During the Crusades, it was the home of the Knights Templars. Later, during the Renaissance, it became the most fashionable enclave in Paris where aristocrats lived and socialized. It declined in the late seventeenth century after Versailles began to replace Paris as the focus of royal attention.

The Jews settled in the Marais early on in its history, but they kept being expelled and then returning and then being expelled again. After the annexation of Alsace, they returned to the Marais. Together with the Sephardic Jews from Bordeaux and the Jews from Avignon, they became French during the Revolution—the very model of French integration. However, in the late nineteenth century, they confronted other immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe and North Africa, all of whom did not form a united Jewish community. Nevertheless, by the twentieth century, the Marais had become the mythical home for the Jews of France (and for much of the European diaspora as well).

The Chinese—especially immigrants from the port cities of Wenzhou and Qingtian—began to arrive in France in the late nineteenth century and they settled in the Marais after the 1930s. Cantonese-speaking Chinese moved in after the 1950s, but they did not always stay in the Marais. Consequently, the Chinese community was even less united than the Jewish community, and they have remained the least integrated ethnic group in modern Paris.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Marais underwent a period of gentrification designed to revive the old neighborhood as the expression of the universal values of the French Republic. Strangely enough, this gentrification really took off after the gay bar, Le Village, opened as a community center in 1978. Thereafter, the Marais became known as the gay neighborhood in Paris due to the commercial successes of its bars, restaurants, bookstores, boutiques, and other establishments. However, gays and lesbians do not actually live in the Marais; they just go there to play.

"And for better or for worse," David Caron states in his book, "it is a French neighborhood" (p.26). But is the Marais a ghetto?

The medieval word for the neighborhood in Italian cities where the Jews were confined is not appropriate either for the Jewish Marais, the Chinese Marais, or the Gay Marais. However, for those who fear that the Jews, the Chinese, or the gays form a community based on shared identities that challenge the universal notion of citizenship upon which the French Republic is founded, the notion of a "ghetto" serves as a useful rhetorical device. In particular, Caron examines how it was used in the debates over AIDS and PaCS by Jewish rabbis, conservative politicians, activists from Act-Up, and other more circumspect gays and lesbians. In one section, he explores the controversial novels of

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Guillaume Dustan, who exposed only one side of gay life in the Marais--perhaps an exaggerated view of the Marais as gay ghetto.

After reviewing this history of the Marais in the first part of the book, and after investigating this use of the concept of "ghetto" in contemporary French politics, especially with regard to issues concerning gays and lesbians, Caron goes on in the second part of his book to focus on some of the elements that make up communities. Specifically, he is concerned with the initial notions of self-hatred (or shame), which, if not acknowledged, may lead to problems of authenticity. Some readers may find this section quite unsettling, especially in this era of gay pride. Disasters such as the AIDS epidemic and the Holocaust absorb much of his attention. For example, Charlotte Delbo's trilogy, *Auschwitz et après*, allows him to discuss the alienation that many Holocaust survivors encountered when they tried to adjust to modern society. Robert Anthelme's *L'espèce humain* provides him with some clues on how group friendships operated in the death camps. From these literary works, Caron theorizes that failures (on the individual, familial, or societal level) may cause some people, whether Jewish, Chinese, gay or lesbian, to come together as a community, but even here he is questioning.

Behind all of these theoretical ruminations, Caron references his relationship to his father--whence the title of his book. In a brilliant prologue and a thoughtful epilogue, he tells his readers that his father was a Hungarian Jew who felt more Hungarian than Jewish, although others considered him more Jewish than Hungarian. He moved to France in the 1930s, passed through the Marais, and settled in Caen where his older sister and her husband worked. In 1940 he joined the Foreign Legion and was immediately captured and spent the rest of the war years in a prisoner-of-war camp. Surprisingly, the Germans considered him more French than Jewish. After the war, he joined the Israeli army, but he was never a Zionist, so he returned to France.

Caron is the son of this father and a French mother, whom the father never married. He is also an academic, who now teaches literature at the University of Michigan.

So is the father Hungarian, Jewish, Israeli, or French? Is Caron French, Jewish, American, or gay? Throughout his book, Caron questions these categories of identities, their relationships to communities, and the very notion of French universal citizenship.

William A. Peniston  
The Newark Museum  
wpeniston@newarkmuseum.org

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