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In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in
Twentieth-Century France (review)

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"I am the Lord of the Universe. If you are displeased with the way I conduct the world, I will return it to void and null." Hearing these words, Michael knew that there was to be no reversal. He had heard these words once before in connection with the Ten Martyrs. He knew their effect. He went back to his place ashen and dejected, but could not resist looking back sheepishly at God and saw a huge tear rolling down His face, destined for the legendary cup which collects tears and which when full, will bring the redemption of the world. Alas, to Michael's horror, instead of entering the cup the tear hit its rim, most of it spilling on the ground—and the fire of the crematorium continued to burn. (Forward to David Weiss Halivini, *The Book and the Sword, A Life of Learning in the Shadow of Destruction* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996])

After the Shoah it is imperative that both Jews and Christians find ways to at least widen the cup so that the redemption of the world may finally come. Here is an approach which may show promise and hope for widening the cup.

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In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France, by Maud S. Mandel. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. 317 pp. \$23.95.

Armenians and Jews differ in most things, including religion, origins, language, and socio-economic profile. Armenians are an ancient Christian community, one of the oldest in the world, whose origins lie in the Anatolian plateau of Asia Minor. Although Jewish roots may be traced to ancient Israel and Judah, for nearly two millennia Jews have been a diaspora community with shifting centers of concentration, from Rome, to Spain, to western Europe, to eastern Europe and Russia, to the United States, and most recently to modern Israel. Armenian is an Indo-European language; Hebrew is Semitic. Yiddish is a Germanic blend written in Hebrew, and Ladino is a blend of medieval Castilian, combined with Hebrew, Turkish, and Arabic. Until the latter half of the 19th century, Armenians were peasant farmers living in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, while most European Jews were an urban population, prohibited from farming, earning its living as merchants, petty-traders, money-lenders, and skilled craftsmen.

Despite these many differences, Armenians and Jews share tragic modern histories in the Ottoman Empire and Europe, respectively, where they expe-

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rienced massacres and genocide. The Armenian Genocide of 1915–23 destroyed more than half of Ottoman Armenians, while the Holocaust exterminated two-thirds of European Jewry. Both of these disasters, and the decades of violence that preceded them, produced refugee populations as well as bitter memories of persecution and survival for both peoples. Different though they may have been, Armenians and Jews share the common experience of massive violence, trauma, survival, flight, and the attempt to reestablish a normal existence in strange new lands.

In the Aftermath of Genocide is Maud S. Mandel's attempt to compare and contrast the similar and yet different experiences of these two communities in twentieth-century France. After the First World War, France was the principal place in Western Europe to which Armenians and Jews fled, seeking shelter and recovery. It was a modern, republican, democratic country with a strong tradition of assimilating immigrants and rejecting separate ethnic development. However, during the Second World War, Armenian and Jewish paths in France diverged: for the most part Armenians were not victimized, but French Jews and Jewish refugees, who had sought shelter in France before the war, were targets of the Nazis and their accomplices in Vichy. What happened to the two traumatized communities under these changing conditions? Specifically, what was the Armenian communal reaction in the interwar period in France following the genocide of 1915, and what was the Jewish reaction following the Holocaust? How did these two communities deal with their violent pasts? How did they assimilate or not assimilate to France? What were their relations with their communities in the diaspora, and with the new states, Armenia and Israel, that rose like two phoenixes following the two genocides? Mandel, who teaches in the History department and the Judaic Studies program at Brown University, has written an important, complex, and fascinating study.

One might think that given the traumatic experiences of genocide, on the one hand, and the powerful pull of a French society and state that insisted on assimilation, on the other, both Armenians and Jews would have faded as distinct communities, submerging their ethnoreligious identities in the larger whole. But that is not what happened. In their different ways both communities managed successfully to adapt and to adjust, economically, socially, and culturally, to the post-war conditions following the two world wars, and both communities have been able to negotiate the difficult terrain between their communal identities as Armenians or Jews and their nationalities as Frenchmen and Frenchwomen. Remarking on the success of French Jews to adjust following the Holocaust, one survivor remarked, "The truth is it was not difficult—less difficult than adjusting to death" (p. 10).

Complicating matters still further for post-war French Armenians and Jews was the rise of an independent Republic of Armenia and of Israel respectively. With the exception of a few nationalists who emigrated, most Armenians and Jews remained in France, while supporting the independence of the new states. The creation of Israel in particular seems to have reinforced an assertiveness on the part of French Jews who had already begun "to articulate a more politically defined notion of Jewish identity" following the Holocaust (p. 204). Similarly, after the Second World War a new generation of Armenians, feeling secure as French citizens, were able to give voice to their support for Armenia and to solidarity with the Armenian diaspora. Neither community, however, felt that it wished to trade its French identity for another or that their new "homelands" had any political or legal claims on them.

Despite the many parallels between Armenians and Jews in France, Mandel might have stressed some of the differences perhaps more than she does. Mandel does point out that unlike the Armenians, native French Jews have a long history in the country. They were officially emancipated after the revolution, a status confirmed again by Napoleon in 1806, but that did not prevent the rise of modern French antisemitism in the manner of Drumont and the Action Française, which in its 19th and 20th century incarnations was as vicious as any other in Europe. French Jews have had ample time to become fully integrated into French society. That they have not suggests that their traditional pariah status in Europe still clings to them even after the Holocaust, and the religious divide remains deep, deeper than for Armenians who are Christians and have converted to Catholicism. Moreover, given their experiences, French Jews may not wish fully to assimilate into a post-Holocaust and post-Vichy France. In the future it is possible to foresee an unselfconscious Armenian strain in French culture and identity, but one suspects that Jews will remain apart as they have in the past.

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Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity, edited by Dinah I. Shelton. Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005. 3 vols., 1458 pp. \$395.00.

Responding but not limited to the near-successful state-authorized murder of European Jewry during World War II, professor and lawyer Raphael Lemkin coined and defined the term genocide as actions of deconstruction