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Ivan Jablonka. *Enfants en exil: transfert de pupilles rÃ©unionnais en mÃ©tropole (1963-1982).* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2007. 349 pp. EUR 21.00 (paper), ISBN 978-2-02-093229-5.

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Exiled in France: The Plight of a Generation of Réunionnais Children

Ivan Jablonka, professor at the Université du Maine, offers an engaging and, at times, disturbing insight into the practice of transferring children from the island of La Réunion to metropolitan France from the 1960s to 1980s with his most recent work *Enfants en exil.* La Réunion, a volcanic island in the southwestern Indian Ocean, has been a "department" or administrative division of France since 1946, and, as such, is considered part of France, sharing its language and predominant Roman Catholic religion. From 1963-82, sixteen hundred Réunionnais children were sent to France without the prospect of a return trip. Jablonka details the fate of the transferred children, as well as the reasons behind this migration policy and its place in a wider historical context, linking it ultimately to some of the darkest moments of French history. While such a study could be imbued with political bias, Jablonka seeks to distance himself from any political agenda and documents this migration of children, which he ties to questions of contemporary France, the Republic, and the effects of decolonization.

In the first of three sections, Jablonka deals with the traumatic uprooting of the Réunionnais children. Removed from their homes both to address child welfare (malnutrition, poor hygiene, promiscuity, and alcoholism) and to lower the island's soaring demographic, as Jablonka highlights, the children experienced culture shock in the cold and seemingly hostile environment of metropolitan France. In ethnically homogenous rural France, racism was only one problem awaiting the youngsters frequently placed in institutions whose quasi-military regimes contrasted greatly with freedom of La Réunion. For Jablonka, it is hard to estimate the number of Réunionnais children who developed psychological problems as a result of this uprooting. The aims of this migration were, then, twofold: to provide opportunity for Réunionnais children and to repopulate areas of France affected by a rural exodus. The lack of manpower in France frequently led to children working in slavelike nineteenth-century conditions: malnourished, beaten, and abused. While delinquency, depression, and the inability to adapt characterized the majority of stories, Jablonka draws out what he considers to be the one success story of the migration policy–the adoption of babies and very young children by French families–and questions why this was not more greatly encouraged.

In Jablonka's second section, he studies the mind and the institutions behind the operation, Michel Debré and the DDASS (*Direction départementale de l'action sanitaire et sociale*, an external service of the ministry of health, working with social workers, present in both La Réunion and France). Jablonka depicts Debré as passionate and energetic, revitalizing La Réunion. Former prime minister, friend of Charles de Gaulle, and resistance fighter, Debré was a modernizer whose ambition for La Réunion was to "nourrir, soigner, instruire" (feed, care, and instruct) (p. 111). While Debré's fervor reduced squalor in La Réunion, his concerns, as Jablonka makes clear, about overpopulation were exaggerated. In this section, Jablonka examines the legality of the migration, pointing out the administration's propensity for working within the law and parents' lack of understanding it. He does not depict the DDASS in such a favorable light; he points to social workers' zeal to classify children as abandoned, to ignore other family members willing to provide care, and to coerce parents into agreement to expedite the transfer of their children. The DDASS in France was guilty of a deficit of care toward its charges. Jablonka highlights the case of one particular département la Creuse whose reception of the children was nothing more than a fiasco. Jablonka charts the scheme's optimistic start, leading to the key year of 1966, which saw a peak in the number of departures from La Réunion. As psychological problems began to show and centers in France reached saturation levels, the migration policy was questioned and eventually drew to an end. The impetus came from overburdened French institutions rather

than La Réunion. Set against a period of decolonization in France, Debré's policy of moving children of color to France, providing them with a utopian dream of training and employment, is not, for Jablonka, an act of racism but the act of a true republican.

In his third section, Jablonka examines the mediatization of this migration policy in France. Despite brief peaks of interest in this policy in the late 1960s and early 1990s, the migration only made headline news in 2002 when Jean-Jacques Martial, a former Réunionnais ward, launched a legal battle for damages, citing "enlèvement et séquestration de mineur, rafle et deportation" (abduction and sequestration of a minor, roundup and deportation) (p. 209). Jablonka highlights the media's ensuing semantic shift in the description of this policy: from migration to deportation, from children to victims. While some commentators have drawn parallels with the Nazi deportation of Jews, Jablonka is careful not to be drawn into such a degree of sensationalism, putting the scale of this migration into perspective. He also considers the wider historical context of childhood migrations, including the stolen generation of Aboriginal Australians and the movement of children within the commonwealth. He argues that this French policy was neither genocidal nor expansionist in nature but rather philanthropic at heart. He emphasizes that in all cases children were deliberately cut off from families to satisfy political aims.

Jablonka acknowledges the difficulties in finding documentation to shed light on this little-known page of French history, notably from the département la Creuse whose archives remain unexamined. His final chapter contains a selection of primary sources: correspondence mainly testifying to the overall failure of the scheme and the suffering of those concerned. Jablonka states that he has endeavored to be "un militant de la vérité" (a militant of truth) in this work; his personal standpoint is nevertheless clear from the outset with his first chapter entitled "malheur, violence, folie" (misfortune, violence, madness) (pp. 259, 13). His conclusion is equally as disturbing: "la migration des pupilles réunionnais n'est donc pas un dérapage; elle est une institution républicaine" (the migration of Réunionnais children is not therefore a mere blunder, but rather a republican institution) (p. 245). For Jablonka, the legality of the policy and the good intentions of those behind it do not legitimize it, but rather classify it as a form of neocolonialism.

Written in French in a style accessible to a variety of readers, not only those with historical backgrounds, this text would engage readers interested in child welfare and the movement of abandoned children, the period of French decolonization, and DOM-TOM (départements d'outre-mer and collectivités d'outre-mer) politics. Elise Lemai's *La Déportation des Réunionnais de la Creuse: Témoignages* (2004), a collection of personal testimonies from those on the receiving end of this policy of migration, provides further reading on this topic. For younger readers, Brigitte Peskine's *L'île de mon père* (2003) offers a fictional account of the effects of this transportation of children from La Réunion.

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