"To Be or Not to Be French": Soixante-Huitard Reflections on "la Question Juive"

Jonathan Judaken

While the debates condensed in the catchphrase "the Jewish Question" go back to the eighteenth century, "la question juive" first crystallized as a concept in the 1860s at the crossroads between images of the "old" ghetto Jew and newly assimilating Jews. It was subsequently used by both anti-Semites and anti-semites to address the range of issues involved in Jewish emancipation: from civic equality to civil education, from economic rights to concepts about whether Jews could become soldiers, from religious freedom to discussions of whether Jews were a distinctive people, race, or nation. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, Jean-Paul Sartre's Réflexions sur la question juive reopened this Pandora's box of topics when few dared to address a subject that had become taboo as a result of the Shoah. Written in the months following the Liberation of France and immediately before the Allies entered Auschwitz, Sartre's text was a meditation on the possibility of an emancipated Jewish existence in France, and on the quandaries of Jewish emancipation generally.

Whether antagonistic or conciliatory, whether Jews or non-Jews, French writers in the post-war period often determined their own stance on the issues raised by "the Jewish Question" relative to Sartre's Réflexions. The Réflexions became an Un-text not because of Sartre's deep understanding of Jews and Judaism but because his analysis framed the questions of the debate on "the Jewish Question" in the post-war period. What is the relation between being and being "the Jew"? Is Jewishness for oneself or for others? Is Judaism imagined or real? Is being Jewish a response to a general human condition or to a particularly Jewish situation? Is it determined by the gaze of the Other or by the specular examination of the Self? In reviews, articles, journals and books, Sartre's analysis was often the touchstone for a re-examination of the questions that structured the four parts of his study: how does one become an anti-Semite and how is anti-Semitism perpetuated? What defines Jewish anxiety and what are the limits of the liberal tolerance of this difference? What is the relationship between anti-Semitism and Jewish identity? And how should the French respond to or somehow solve the problem of anti-Semitism?
Sartre’s Réflexions thus served to open a genealogy of responses “after Auschwitz” to the array of dilemmas that have haunted la question juive from its inception. These responses included Sartre’s own repeated returns to and re-examinations of his Réflexions, most radically in his last published interviews with Benny Lévy. Each of Sartre’s interventions were themselves complicated by the biographical accounts of them in Simone de Beauvoir’s mémoires and in the biographies and works of Jeanette Colombel, Eli Sem-Gal and Annie Cohen-Solal, among others. Sartre’s Réflexions also profoundly marked the agonized and agonistic effort to re-imagine the relations between juif(e)(ishness), juidiste (Judaism), juive (anti-Semitic images or anti-Semitism), and la question juive after the Shoah in the work of Albert Memmi, Robert Mifral, André Neher, and 14 writers of the generation of May 1968. Furthermore, Sartre’s anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist thesis that “the Jew” is a construct of the specular gaze of the French anti-Semite and his emphasis on Jewish alterity as the paradigm of the Other in French and Western culture was pivotal for postmodern and deconstructive interrogations of “the Jewish Question” like those of Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Maurice Blanchot, Julia Kristeva and Jean-François Lyotard.

This paper will focus on the readings of Sartre’s Réflexions by the seconde-filshier generation of French-Jewish thinkers, focusing on the work of Pierre Goldman, Alain Finkielkraut, Shmuel Trigano, and Benny Lévy. In referring to the seconde-filsgeneration, I mean the age group that was reaching adulthood in the period around the events of May-June 1968 in France. In early May, street protests in the Seine and elsewhere led to an alignment with workers that resulted in the largest strikes in French history, which shut down the country and almost toppled de Gaulle’s government. Inspired by the Third World decolonization movements led by Che Guevara and Mao Tsetung, among others, students contested hierarchy, authority and the alienation of everyday life in industrially advanced societies and demanded greater possibilities for free expression (including of their sexuality) in a world dominated by the mass-media and bureaucratic routines. The symbolic politics of this generation which focused on politicizing all aspects of life led directly to third-generation feminism, gay liberation, the environmental movement and contributions to the socialists regaining power a decade later. The experiences, values, attitudes, and symbols of this era marked all or those who come of age in this period. Jews of this generation were also profoundly affected by the Six-Day War in Israel and the influx of North African Jews who reached France in the wake of decolonization, making France the home of the most numerous and culturally vibrant Jewish community in Europe.

I suggest that Goldman, Finkielkraut, Trigano and Lévy represent the four major considerations that define the positions of post-1968 French-Jewish intellectuals. I argue that the efforts to “work through” the French anti-Semitic past and the history of Jews and Judaism in France in the post-war period is embedded in a double-repetition: (1) those that have constituted a question juive from its origins; and (2) those that shaped Sartre’s own response to “the Jewish Question”. I explore a powerful period that traverses the writings of these French-Jewish intellectuals, already theorized in Sartre’s analysis: efforts at assimilation into “authentic” Frenchness were only dramatically to mimic the Jewiness of the Jew — but paradoxically “the Jew” is never more “Jewish” (or enlivened) than when he seeks to become “French”. The intensity of post-war
reflections on “the Jewish Question” themselves reflect this paradox, inhabiting the double-binds of the French-Jewish dyad.

Jewish radicals

Pierre Goldman embodied the dying spasms of the May 1968 generation and, as Yair Aaron has argued, his death symbolized the death knell of his generation of “radical Jews” who constituted much of the leadership of May 1968. Born on 22 June 1944 in Lyon, his parents were both immigrants from Poland and during World War II were both part of the Jewish resistance allied with the communist party. Goldman was expelled from one school after another for minor acts of rebellion, joined the communist youth and passed his baccalauréat in 1963 studying by himself. He then began his university studies at the Sorbonne, where he was elected to the National Committee of the Union des étudiants communistes (UCEC), one of the important groupuscules (small groups) of the Nouvelle Gauche (New Left). Determined not just to engage in abstract ruminations about revolution, like Regis Debray, Goldman left France to participate in guerrilla activity in Latin America, returning just before the Six-Day War in June 1967 and again before the students’ revolts in 1968. When he returned to France more permanently in 1969, he was involved in a series of armed robberies and was finally arrested and accused of a double murder that had taken place during an armed robbery. He always maintained his innocence about the murders, but he was condemned to life imprisonment. His case became a cause célèbre, primarily because while in prison he would write his memoir entitled Souvenirs obscurs d’un juif polonais né en France, which led to a retrial in which he was found to be innocent.

The case garnered large press coverage and public attention, comparing Goldman’s trial to Kafka’s novel and to the Dreyfus Affair. Supporters insisted that “nous sommes tous comme Pierre Goldman” (we are all like Pierre Goldman) and “nous sommes tous des juifs polonais nés en France” (we are all Polish Jews born in France), echoing the cries heard in the protests of 24 May 1968 in support of Daniel Cohn-Bendit: “Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands” (we are all German Jews). Goldman was eventually released from prison in 1976, served on the editorial board of Les Temps modernes and wrote articles for Libération and other journals, published a novel and was working on a philosophical manuscript when he was murdered by a neo-Nazi group called Hnéide de la Police on 20 September 1979.

It is not only his affiliation with Les Temps modernes and Libération, but also the terms of his discourse that show a clear Sartrean influence. In an interview in Le Monde just before his death, Goldman synthesized his views on Jewish identity:

to be Jewish is not what I have, but my condition. . . . It’s a space that I fill existentially with this and that. . . . And why is this so important? Because of anti-Semitism. Because of the hatred. The only answer to the question of what it means to be a Jew, is Auschwitz. Goldman’s existential conception of Jewish identity and his reiteration that it is “the anti-Semite who makes [is] the Jew” clearly echoes Sartre’s Anti-Semitism in Israel. In response to the appearance of the interview just after his death, Laurence Podselver, an anthropologist who writes on the Hasidim in France said
Pierre Goldman represents our whole period. . . . Like all gifted people, he knew how to express a great deal of what many in my generation think about their Jewish identity. . . . It is full of contradictions and obscure passages. These contradictions are ours.20

The influence of Sartre on Goldman’s construction of his Jewish identity therefore clearly resonated with many of the soixante-huitard generation.

In Godman’s memoir, he states unequivocally that “I was deeply influenced by Sartre”23 and the intertwined theme of banality and existential authenticity—before-death run through much of his autobiographical narrative. Goldman’s self-description quintessentially embodied Sartre’s conception of authenticity: to be what you are not, and not to be what you are.24 In L’éve et le saint, Sartre would correlate this concept with “the profound cohesion and dispersion of the Jewish people” in their “diaspora”: “It is this word which will serve to designate the mode of the being of the For-itself [i.e. authentic humanness]; it is diasporic.”25 Referring to the Vichy period during which Sartre produced his magnum opus, Goldman insisted of his own identity:

I had been in France at a time when I was not permitted to be born French — I did not have to prove that I was French because basically I had never been French. I was only an exiled Jew without a promised land. Exiled indefinitely, infinitely, definitively . . . I had no country, no country other than absolute exile, the Jewish exile of the Diaspora.26

It is this radically accentuated conception of (Jewish) identity that would inspire Hélène Cixous, to write Un K. incompréhensible Pierre Goldman.27 Moreover, an epigraph taken from Leopold Trepper that Goldman uses to open his memoir perfectly summarizes the authentic Jew that Sartre describes in the third part of his Réflexion: “I became a communist because I am a Jew.”

Goldman’s memoir also thematizes a fundamental limit to integration that structures Sartre’s conception of (Jewish) identity: “The Jew” is defined by the gaze of the (French) anti-Semite. This is evident in Goldman’s description of his father Alter Mojsze who came to France from Poland inspired by the ideals of Victor Hugo’s monumental novel of the French Revolution Ninety-Three but soon found that “racism was still alive” in France.28 His father later served in the French Imperial military corps in order to earn his French nationality, and was awarded the Croix de guerre because he returned to the front on 10 May 1940 (the beginning of the German assault on France in World War II) when he was on leave. Nevertheless, Goldman states unequivocally that while “He deserved his French nationality. . . . he was never so much a Jew as at that time.”

Os In the paradigmatic statement of his memoirs, he maintains, “To be or not to be French had never been a question I asked myself. I think I always knew that I was simply a Polish Jew who had been born in France” (7). In short, Goldman represents the influence of Sartre on a constellation of Jewish radicals or gasoumots authentic Jews (in Sartre’s sense), defined more by their radicalism than their Judaism, but for whom the two were never separate, that include Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Alain Geiss, André Glucksman, Alain Krivine, Marc Krasvitz, Bernard Kouchner, Régine Diko-Ass-Cohen, and Michele Firk, among others.27
Imaginary Jews?

Alain Finkielkraut is another child born in France of Polish Jews. His father arrived from Warsaw in the 1930s, but was subsequently deported and spent three years in Auschwitz. His mother left Lvov for Germany in the thirties and then escaped to Belgium where she survived the war with false papers before moving to France in 1948, where she married, giving birth to Alain one year later. He grew up with a strong sense of his Jewish identity, that nevertheless had little Jewish content. When the May events erupted, Finkielkraut was an active albeit unknown footsoldier amongst the Maoist militants. This deferred the completion of his hypokhôgne and khôgne at Lycée Henri IV, which prepared him to enter the École Normale Supérieure de Saint Cloud to study French literature.

Following the publication of Le juif imaginaire in 1980, Finkielkraut would emerge as one of the most visible Jewish intellectuals working on questions of identity and Jewish identity in particular—in relation to nationalism, the Holocaust, French denial and the politics of memory. He is the author of a number of books on these themes and his ideas are widely disseminated as the editor of Le Messager européen and in his regular appearances in the French media, including on his own radio talk show, Répliques. The influences on Finkielkraut are multiple, but the Sartrean strand remains significant especially in Le juif imaginaire where Finkielkraut states, “I’m not attacking the book that Sartre devoted to the Jewish problem. This slight work remains a fascinating, fundamental, beneficial text.” Unlike Goldman, Finkielkraut’s analysis of the dilemmas of Jewish identity “after Auschwitz” expresses a disillusionment with gauchoïne (the New Left) and addresses the impossibility of a return to an authentic Jewishness and the traps of asserting that position.

Le juif imaginaire is a brilliant and insightful meditation by a modern, secular Jew whose parents intentionally raised him with no meaningful Jewish education. Nevertheless, their life experience as survivors embodied their testimony to a decimated culture: “Five years had been enough to destroy an entire civilization. . . . Yiddishkeit was erased as one of the world’s unique cultures. That’s why I, an Ashkenazi, am a Jew without substance.” It is this abyssal absence that structures Finkielkraut’s construction of his own Jewishness: “What makes me a Jew is the acute consciousness of a lack, of a continuous absence: my exile from a civilization which, for ‘my own good,’ my parents did not want me to keep in trust” (114).

In Finkielkraut’s self-presentation, the Sartrean conception of (Jewish) subjectivity where the self is always dependent upon “the look” of the Other is complicated because the Other also turns out to be Finkielkraut himself. This inscribes within the text a distrust of its own self-reflective mode and personal memory. This is evident in the opening chapter, “The protagonist introduced” that frames the text and specifically indicates the centrality of Sartre for Finkielkraut’s own analysis. The text begins with a memory from childhood where Alain was verbally assaulted by some young boys who yelled at him “Crève, sale juif!” (Go to hell, dirty Jew!). Finkielkraut remembers that this insult was a baptism which conferred on the child the sense that “I am Jewish: this consciousness of a hidden uniqueness, of an invisible and ineffaceable difference.” Finkielkraut self-consciously deploys this Sartrean moment where identity is conferred by the didactical encounter with the Other and makes this clear later in the text when he cites Sartre’s study of Genet: “Name is destiny: Having been called ‘thief’ in his
youth, nothing remained for Genet except 'the task of carrying the adventure signified in his name to its logical end'" (27). Finkielkraut's text from its opening pages problematizes Sartre's conception of Jewishness, following what is signified by the name "Jew" to its logical end, ultimately destabilizing Sartre's conception of authenticity. In his youth, Finkielkraut availed himself of the vocabulary [Sartre] bestowed upon my existence . . . With unapproachable rigor [Sartre] told me that I was an authentic Jew that I assumed my condition and that courage, even heroism were required for me to claim so loudly and so strongly my ties to a people in disgrace . . . Sartre's prose filled the gap between what I imagined myself to be and the existence I actually led. I was a nice Jewish boy, indulging myself in nomadic fantasias and a revolt without risk, subject to none of their malaise.56

Finkielkraut is aware that his story is of the post-Holocaust child who inherits the suffering of his forebears, but who never endured their oppression and that Sartre's analysis facilitated the terms of this self-deception: "Enchanted by my image, I immersed myself in the dream which Réflexions sur la question juive gave the bitter, viable face of reality."57 He recognizes that his conception of authentic Jewishness was grounded in the "family stories of the final solution"58 and that ultimately his claim to authenticity was a fiction of his own family romance. To lay claim to the estrangement and exile of Jewish identity on the basis of his father's generations experience in Auschwitz was bad faith, a "drama without a fateful event" (6). The "imaginary Jew" is the name that Finkielkraut gives to those Jewish mama's boys, protected from the horrors of the persecution of Jews, who are "cowards in life, martyred in dreams" because "they have not performed their apprenticeship to Judaism under the gaze of the Other" (14-15).

There is a direct correlation that Finkielkraut establishes between the "bad faith" of his conception of his own "authentic" Jewish identity and the New Left of May 1968 whom Finkielkraut chides in the second chapter as imaginary revolutionaries. This chapter, entitled "Tous des Juifs après ça?" (All German Jews?) begins with the memory of the marches in support of Daniel-Cohn Bendit. In retrospect, Finkielkraut says that

the only thing I could really hold against these ephemeral German Jews was their caricature of my own Jewishness. They were Jews, but only for the sake of the image, just as I was, just as at any given moment our entire generation might strike an anarchist, Trotskyist or Maoist pose. (18)

Like Finkielkraut himself, he insists that the soixante-huitard generation lived a carnavalesque charade:

Ours was a generation with a genius for mimicry. Yet it never occurred to these activists, who professed only contempt for those who lived in forgetfulness of history, that their own political commitments rested on a phantasm of history at best. (20)

The entire revolt in May 1968, Finkielkraut suggests, was a festival of "symbolic identification": "All German Jews? Come on: we were all imaginary Jews" (21). Finkielkraut assents to Milan Kundera's analysis of 1968: "Dream is reality, the
students wrote on the wall, but it seems that the opposite was true: their reality (the barricades, the overturned cars, the red flags) was a dream.” (21). May 1968 was the simulacrum incarnate: “We imitated images” (23).

Rather than an authentic symbol of the revolutionary sixties, for Finkielkraut, Goldman is a symbol of the impossibility of reconciliation with the martyrs, of the danger of “appropriating the Holocaust as my own, draping myself with the torture that others underwent. Goldman helped me turn traitor and inform against myself. I have ceased making an innocent claim to the difference I possess.”36. This self-critique, however, leaves Finkielkraut in a paradoxical position, since he is a confirmed atheist, but does not wish to renounce his

[jewish] origins, or even to mount an argument of my own for a policy of silence or assimilation. I am a Jew, its hold is inescapable. . . . I am Jew, yet the figure designated by this statement can be located nowhere—neither in the constants of my character nor in the biographical events of my life.40

What remains for Finkielkraut is the trace of the past in memory. Here again, Finkielkraut will be guided by Sartre but take him to the limits of his own position. For the “introspective Jew” memory is “the inward gaze” (38). But like interpersonal relations in the Sartrean schema, in our relation to the past, Finkielkraut suggests that we must be aware of nostalgia, which is an essentializing, narcissistic and metaphysical conception of history that reifies and monumentalizes the past as an image; it is an imaginary past. Here Finkielkraut’s text is rather slippery. On the one hand, he will insist on a quintessential restatement of Sartre’s famous claim that “man is a useless passion”,41 which meant for Sartre that while man tries to fix absolutely the meaning of [his] being this is a vain effort given man’s ontological condition. In Finkielkraut’s phrase “memory it is thus the useless passion a vanished civilization stirs in me”.42 In this moment, Finkielkraut mourns the iteration of the victimizing logic that positions the Jew as interminable outsider because their relationship to Jewishness is only based on a monumentalized conception of the Shoah, to the detriment of Jewish culture. On the other hand, however, Finkielkraut’s text is filled with a melancholia for an idealized Jewish world lived somehow before memory, where Jews had “two thousand years of History at the tip of . . . [a] tongue”. (38) He expresses “unquestionable nostalgia for the Jewish life of Central Europe”, insisting that “Jewish life was suddenly reduced to folklore by a specific, singular, and quite recent event: the Holocaust” (37). He yearns for a jildishkeit that will “come naturally” (38). This is Finkielkraut’s own nostalgic and imaginary Jewish world, a fictitious fabrication that never existed except in the imagination. In the end, Finkielkraut himself is caught in the aporias of Sartre’s structure:

Jewishness is what I miss, not what defines me, the base burning of an absence, not any triumphant, plentiful instinct. I call that part of myself Jewish that remains at odds with life in its time, and which cultivates the powerful supremacy of what has been over what is. (38)

In the post-Shoah era, the unbinding of the double bind between the inassimilable Jew and the assimilated Jew rebounds because the identity to be affirmed can only be “an unending obsession and imaginary tale” (82). The
post-Holocaust world thus transforms the logic of assimilation, which originally demanded that that one be a man on the outside and a Jew on the inside. The Shoah, however, was an event that had the double effect of accelerating the process of assimilation and depriving it of its raison d'être. Why identify with liberal Europe if it's only to end your life as a free man in a sealed-off train? . . . And why as well, after Auschwitz, should you continue using a language and living a culture and way of life that makes you stand out, that turns you into a visible and therefore willing victim? (108)

Ultimately this results in Finkielkraut's Jewishness as empty, except in opposition to what it is not. The negativity of his identity, however, serves a critical force in relationship to anti-Semitism and racism and a self-critical force in relationship to dogmatic conceptions of Jewish identity. This negation has guided Finkielkraut in the subsequent texts that he published, first in his castigation of the deniers of the Holocaust in L'Avènt d'une négation (1982) and subsequently in his critique of the anti-Zionism expressed during the Lebanon War in La Répétition d'Israël (1983), in his intervention into the culture wars and his rejection of multiculturalism in La Défense de la pensée (1987) and his critique of the way in which memory was manipulated in the Klaus Barbie trial.62 Finkielkraut's positive values, especially his effort to rethink the humanist and Enlightenment tradition by affirming the commonality of humanity as its diversity, draws more on the sources of the western tradition than the Jewish tradition.63 Ultimately this leaves Finkielkraut straddling the double-binds of the French-Jewish social contract that has preoccupied his many political interventions acutely summarized by David Suchow:

The Imaginary Jew thus imagines a Jewish politics that is anti-assimilationist but committed to the Enlightenment, supportive of Israel while it argues for the Diaspora, and a proponent of ethnic particularism rooted in history, yet that aspires to remain in critical tension with universal ideals.64

This position aligns Finkielkraut with other Jewish intellectuals like Robert and Elisabeth Badinter, Pierre Birnbaum, Elisabeth de Fontenay, Dominique Schnapper, Chantal Benayoun, and Catherine Kintzler.

Radical Jews

Benny Lévy represents a position almost diametrically opposed to Finkielkraut's. In Lévy's case it is not by allusion, but quite directly that his public reputation and his writings are inextricably bound up with Sartre. He was born the third of three sons, in Cairo in 1946, into a family of middle-class Jewish families with a heritage of radical politics.65 The year after the British lost control of the Suez Canal in 1956, like many other Jewish families the Lévy's left. While finishing his secondary education in Brussels, Lévy devoured the works of Sartre. He later moved to Paris to study for entrance to the École Normale Supérieure, France's elite intellectual training academy, where he joined his brother Tony who was already a member of the Union des Étudiants Communistes (UEC). Lévy aligned himself with the Althusser faction, sat on the executive committee and was part of the group of Maoist-inspired members who left with Robert Lintbart to form the Union des Jeunesse Communistes (marxistes-leninistes (UJC [ML])).
Linhart refused to let the UJC [mil] participate in the early days of May because he wanted the revolution to be ‘working-class’. In the midst of the events, however, he collapsed from exhaustion trying to come to terms theoretically with the events of May. Lévy was left in charge of the group. He promptly led them into the melee, just as the students were aligning themselves with the workers, to create the largest strike in French history.

In the immediate aftermath of the events, owing to schisms with the UJC [mil], Lévy left the group with about 30 people and formed a new party, La Gauche Proletarienne [GPP]. The GPP took over the paper La Cause du peuple,55 which was previously the organ of the UJC [mil]. When the French government declared la Causse du Peuple illegal in March 1970, Sartre was asked to front the paper. He agreed and became the paper’s ‘titular director’ endorsing the Maoists right to publish, even though he did not always agree with the group’s political actions. In the following two years, Sartre did, however, often join the Maoists when they marched on factories and demonstrated. In 1973, Sartre helped to found Libération, which he later said was part of his oeuvre.49 In order to raise the money for the newspaper, Sartre started a series of conversations with Benny Lévy and Philippe Gavri (a journalist for Tout and a leader of Vive la Révolution) in November 1972 that were published under the title On a raison de se révolter. In the interviews, the three traced Sartre’s political trajectory and analysed the thinking of the New Left.49 In the summer of 1973, Sartre suffered a stroke and went blind. In the autumn, the GPP disbanded all political activity; the leaders of the group, including Lévy, decided that the military wing of the group had grown too violent, leaning in the direction of the Baader-Meinhof gang.50 After the break-up of the group, Sartre offered Benny Lévy a job – to help him finish his Flashfor. In 1974, Sartre wrote a letter to Valéry Giscard d’Estaing on Lévy’s behalf asking him to give citizenship to Lévy. In December 1974, Benny Lévy went to Stuttgart with Sartre to talk to the terrorist André Baader, who had tried to make contact with the GPP earlier; they were joined by Daniel Cohn-Bendit as translator. Sartre soon began planning a series of dialogues with Lévy that would be collected together as Pouvoir et Liberté, which he hoped would finally complete his potentially deferred work on ethics. During this same period, Benny Lévy began to explore his Judaism. Sartre and Lévy went to Israel together in February 1976, four months after Egypt’s President Anwar Sadat made his famous trip to Jerusalem that would result in the Camp David Peace accords.

In March 1980, the first versions of Sartre’s dialogue with Benny Lévy were published in Le Nouvel Observateur under the title L’esprit maintenu, and appeared in three successive installments on 10, 17 and 24 March 1980 and were later republished by Lévy as a book. The original publication of L’esprit maintenu caused an affair in France and in the midst of the controversy, Sartre entered Broussais hospital and died on 15 April. The interviews were considered scandalous because in the dialogue with Lévy, Sartre radically reassesses some of the fundamental tenets and concepts of his philosophical system, including his early conception of consciousness and his acceptance of Marxism as the basis for his political thought. Perhaps most shocking, however, was how Sartre, the infamous atheist, stressed the importance to non-Jews like himself of the Jewish concept of the “coming of the Messiah.” In La Cérémonie des adieux, published in 1981 as her testament to Sartre’s final years, Simone de Beauvoir rejects the validity of the interviews on the grounds that the ideas in the conversation were coerced by
Benny Levy. De Beauvoir insists that the dialogues comprised a "détournement de vieillards" by the manipulative Levy who addicted the old man for his own depraved purposes.

Levy's own analysis of Sartre's oeuvre in his first book, Le nom de l'homme: Dialogue avec Sartre, followed the lines that Levy explored with Sartre in his many dialogues with him and was published by Veyser, the publishing house that was formed by a group of former Maoists. His insightful, rigorously internal reading of Sartre is crystallized in a short article that focuses explicitly on "Sartre et la jalousie." Here he exposes Levis, albeit in a refined, often enigmatic and allusive style, the centrality of phantasmatic and negative representations of Jews and Judaism, for the self-construction of the Occident. (146) He explores the tensions between France's magnificent cultural heritage and the assimilation it demands as the price of citizenship, explicitly addressing the issue in terms of his relations with Sartre: "I never adopted Sartre, he adopted me, naturalized me in a sense; I was in France thanks to Sartre's grace" (146). He goes on to state that Sartre himself "afflicted - this France was a dirty tick [tsopepire])" (140), suggesting again the theme that Levy's Jenaerness remained on the margins at precisely the moment that he was assimilated by the nation thanks to the grace of one of its national icons. Quoting Sartre's Réflexions, however, he also shows that Sartre clung to "the true culture that is la Révolution." Seeking to undermine Sartre's revolutionary politics in its own terms, Levy indicates the foundational significance of Sartre's Réflexions for his later anticolonial advocacy of the "wretched of the earth," and more generally critiques Sartre's essentialist-Marxist conception of revolution by suggesting that the difference of the stranger, the downtrodden and the colonized, which, he suggests, are homologues in Sartre's thought for "the Jew," would ultimately be assimilated by Sartre's revolutionary politics.

The relation is unequal between the Master and the slave, but precisely the secret of the proletarian - like the colored - is that they contain the destruction of bourgeois society within themselves,... (However, the human will not be Jenaerized, the Jew will simply remain humanity.) Moreover, he suggests that tracing "the Jew" in Sartre's work testifies to an alternate philosophical approach. This is exemplified by Levy by Levinas' critique of Hegelian totality in the name of a non-reciprocal conception of the alterity of the Other as the infinite responsibility of philosophy: "the Jew in Sartre's thought testifies to this phenomenon - in contrast to the philosopher, it is as in Hegelian speculation." He concludes with the talmudic story of Yochanan ben Zakai, which Levy proposes as a specifically Jewish critique of power politics and the eternal return of the same problem that revolutionary politics inevitably face, which is how to institutionalize the differences proposed without creating new forms of oppression.

Inspired by Yochanan ben Zakai's question in the face of the Roman destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem for its academy of study at Yavneh, in the 1980s Levy lived and studied at the Yeshiva des Etudians in Strasbourg "returning" as a Jewish haninah to ultra-Orthodox observance. Led by Eliahu Abirbul, the Yeshiva des Etudians continues the scholarly approach of Vilna's Jews and has attracted many former sioniste-habad radicals. Levy today lives in an ultra-orthodox...
area in Jerusalem and teaches part-time at l’École Doctorale de Jérusalem (Université Paris VIII). He embodies those soixante-huitards Jews who have rejected France and its political traditions in reclaiming Jewish orthodoxy.

Rethinking the Jewish question

Perhaps the most provocative and innovative amongst the soixante-huitards intellectuals is Shmuel Trigano, precisely because of his effort radically to re-evaluate the relations between Jew-foreignness, Judaism, anti-Semitism, and the political implications of “the Jewish Question” outside of the strictures of both the Enlightenment tradition and Sartre’s existential-phenomenology. Like Lévy, Trigano is part of the mass exodus of North African immigrants that have so fundamentally altered the French-Jewish community. Born in a small town (Blida) near Algiers, he grew up with little Jewish education because it was too dangerous during the Algerian War. Leaving Algeria in 1962, his family eventually settled in Paris. Feeling “deeply alienated and uprooted” in the mid-1960s, Trigano would describe this as his “Carmen period.” Seeking like-minded souls, he began to frequent French-Jewish intellectual circles and intended to move to Israel when he graduated in 1967. However, the intensity of the Six-Day War distracted him from his studies and he was still in France for the uprisings in May 1968. Unlike the other figures I have discussed, Trigano found the student revolutionaries morally and ethnically bankrupt and more generally rejected “the West’s revolutionary tradition” (140). He went to study at Hebrew University in 1969, where he spent four years, returning to France “in order not to grow cynical and lose faith in Zionism.” He became the administrative secretary for the socialist Zionist group Le Cercle Bernard Lazare in 1974. His first publication Le Récit de la disparue, appeared in 1977 and was followed by La Nouvelle question juive, both manifestos hoping to rethink Jewish identity and transform the Jewish community and French society on the basis of a re-examination of Jewish values. He has continued this project in his ever-growing list of publications. He has also furthered the discussion of these matters as a founding editor of Traces in 1980, and along with his teacher, the historian and sociologist Annie Kriegel, as one of the founders of the ongoing journal Parler and in his many contributions to L’Arche.

Trigano clearly and unequivocally rejects the terms that structure Sartre’s analysis of Jewish difference. Explicitly citing Sartre and paraphrasing his position, in La nouvelle question juive he states that

Jewish alterity is thus perceived as ambiguous (nuisible) and desperately empty of authenticity. It is thought in a relation of dependence and rotten servility to the Occident. It is necessary from this optic that the Jews ... become like the “others” to be admitted amongst them; to be normalized. The Jew is thus nothing but what “the others” make them. All of our enque lives under this (false) vision.

He argues in “From individual to collectivity: the rebirth of the “Jewish nation” in France”, which is a condensed version of his 1982 work La République et les Juifs après Copernic, for an approach that is critical of “creating Jewish existence as the sediment of outsiders’ perceptions” in favour of re-producing “the Jewish view of things into sociological and historical analysis”. Trigano thus patently rejects the Sartrian axiom that Jews are defined by the gaze of Others and decries the consequences that stem from this thesis.
Trigano is not only critical of Sartre’s response to “the Jewish Question” but to the entire framework that has structured la question juive from its origins. He argues that the discourse of Jewish emancipation from the Enlightenment through the Revolution and beyond, by Jews and non-Jews, was fundamentally structured by bifurcating Jews and citizenship, creating a polarity between Jews and humanity, particularity and universality.

The structure of the Jewish question in modern France could be defined as the interplay arising from the contradiction between the particular and the universal, “nation” and the state, the concrete and the abstract, the ancien régime and the Republic, man and the citizen, the Jew end man, the Jew and the citizen.67

The traps of these binaries were created by the discourse of the Enlightenment and the Revolution and have fundamentally shaped the terms of modern politics tout court.

The same principle (abstract and universal masked) that allowed the founding fathers of the Republic to view the Jews as men led them, in a perfectly logical manner, to ignore and obliterare the Jews among men (Jews and non-Jews), to cease to recognize the Jews among the men they were emancipating.68

The Enlightenment and Revolution thus replaced the mythical Jew of the medieval period with the modern myth of the abstract man and the citizen.

Trigano’s perspectival analysis suggests that this situation does not “necessarily imply that the Republic is anti-Semitic” but rather seeks “to show that it can engender anti-Semitism” (272). It is thus the very conditions of the Franco-Jewish social contract that are the conditions for modern anti-Semitism. This is because “the positive myth (the citizen) that served to mask the negative myth (the Jew) continued to be haunted by the demons of the latter” (250). The result is that the Jew as citizen is always haunted by the mythical Jew, but more perniciously “the Jew could symbolize both France’s absolute negative entity (the anti-Republic) and her absolute positive entity (the Republic par excellence)” (250). The Jewish citizen is thus caught in the antinomies of the French-Jewish dyad, paradoxically becoming more enjamb the more French they become.

Trigano’s project is to work within both the Jewish and Jewish traditions and to bring these traditions into dialogue with and through the Torah and Jewish law in order to deconstruct the antinomies that define French citizenship and modern man. He argues moreover that these dichotomies are themselves the product of the way in which the logos of the West has responded to (Jewish) difference effectively by defining itself through the negation of Jewishness:

For Jewishness to pass from this (passive) “negation” to the (active) “negation” of the Occident is impossible because this negative is part of the polarizing game that is the Occident. The Occident only thinks positively in the negativity (negation) of Jewishness.69

For Trigano, le question juive is thus the hidden face not only of France, but of the West and specifically of its pathways through modernity.

He seeks to oppose the tenacious and congenital objectification of Jews as a negator and to do so without falling into the parallel traps of normalization or assimilation. To achieve this, he advocates a critical Judaism based on the biblical
model of the exodus from Egypt that moves beyond the polarization of
universalism and particularity: “the way of Sinai. The exit from Egypt, liberating,
created a people but also opened a universal trail for humanity.”26 He derides
western metaphysics which is built on the closure of its polarizing logic and seeks
to construct a new politics through the creation of a revived Jerusalem that will be
a city on a hill with multiple entrances into modernity.27 This Jewish theory of
politics should traverse and confront contemporary politics – not just adapt and
reproduce it, which Trigano suggests has been the case with other approaches. He
specifically critiques: (1) diaspora emancipation, (2) revolutionary anti-Judaism,
(3) culturally autonomous diaspora Judaism, and (4) political Zionism as all
leading to self-alienation (19).

Instead he calls for a return to the Jewish community structured by its relation
to Jewish law and the critical reading of Jewish texts, while denouncing radical
separation. He has thus discerned the distinguishing facets of a revived Judaism
in France that can become a new model for France and elsewhere beyond the
limits of Jacobinism or even more liberal solutions to “the Jewish Question”: (1)
a Judaism that affirms the unifying “concept of community”, which is not
fragmented into sectarian movements like the USA or divided into secular and
religious Jews as is the case in Israel; (2) this notion of community inscribed in the
heart of citizenship; (3) the development of a “Jewish civility” with specifically
religious symbols interwoven in civil society; (4) the identification with Zionism
that transcends ideological and institutional differences - conferring a conception
of Jewish peoplehood; (5) the official coupling of de jure orthodoxy and de facto
“heterodoxy”, which he insists saves the integrity of Judaism because such a
model is “certainly normative but not coercive”; (6) the development of Jewish
thought as a strand within the Occidental tradition that is not reduced to Jewish
theology, but instead mobilizes the resources of Judaism to respond to every
contemporary intellectual issue; (7) this Jewish thought should “speak Hebrew in
French” not in the sense of a symbiosis as in nineteenth- and early twentieth-
century France and Germany, but rather register global concerns in Jewish
symbols and values and examine universal concerns within the symbolic forms of
Judaism; (8) finally, this Judaism depends upon an open society like France.28

What Trigano offers are new reflections on the Jewish Question precisely
because he has historicized and destabilized the antinomies that have structured
la question juive. As such, his writing poses the questions that we come with “the
rise of ethnicity and ‘differences’” in the wake of May 196829 and that have
constituted

a radical challenge to the democratic system by revealing its critical impasse: the
difficulty of finding conceptual space for the particular with the reputedly
rational and universal modern state – and thus, conversely, the failure of the
system’s philosophy of the universal.”30

Trigano, along with the group of academics and journalists closest to his
approach, including Raphael Dray, Josy Eisenberg, Gérard Haddad, Albert
Memmi, Maurice-Reuben Hayoun and others, thereby most profoundly “lead to
a new configuration of Jewish existence in the modern or postmodern world” and
as such offer “lessons of universal import, which shed light on the structure of the
crisis of modern citizenship”31.
Conclusion

Tracing the trace of “the Jew” in Sartre’s *Réflexions sur la question* in these four French-Jewish thinkers of the soixantième generation, I have suggested that they embody four of the major positions that define their generation’s response to “the Jewish Question”: (1) Jewish radicals or *gauchiste* Jews, defined more by their radicalism than their Judaism; (2) Jews disillusioned with *gauchisme*, skeptical of claims of Jewish authenticity and who are critically reaffirming the Franco-Jewish social contract, albeit with an awareness of its limits; (3) radical Jews who have rejected France and its traditions in reclaiming Jewish orthodoxy; (4) Jews engaged in reconnecting to Jewish tradition through its texts which serve as a resource for re-examining *la question juive*, conceptions of Frenchness, and the politics of France and the Occident more generally. I have shown that their efforts to “work through” the concatenation of questions that comprise “the Jewish Question” are themselves structured by the longer history of *la question juive* in France, as well as Sartre’s specific analysis of the problem in the post-war period. In their efforts to “work through” the French anti-Semitic past and the history of Jews and Judaism in France after Vichy and the emergence of the state of Israel, they repeat, albeit with significant differences, the problems that have constituted *la question juive* from its origins: the aporias between assimilation and difference and the double-tinds of the French-Jewish social contract. In so doing, they re-evaluate the significance of Judaism and Jewishness in the postmodern age, exposing the paradoxes of French culture’s often concomitant rejection and introjection of the anti-Semitic trope of “the Jew.”

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Notes and references

2. Rather than philosemites, I prefer the term anti-anti-Semites to address the left, “progressive” intellectuals who have intervened on behalf of Jews and Judaism in contests of cultural crisis where anti-Semitism has served a pivotal role as a cultural code for expressing that crisis. Etymologically, the term philosemitism implies a love of Jews and Judaism. However, its usage almost always refers to those who oppose anti-Semitism. Anti-anti-Semitism clearly denotes an opposition to prejudices and stereotypes related to Jews, Judaism and Jewishness and anti-anti-Semites resist the institutionalization of discrimination in ideological state apparatus and discourse practices.
Moreover, in insisting on the term anti-anti-Semitism, I am making three further claims. First, I seek to show that tolerance is itself based on "prejudices" or prejudices that reflect a perceptual system that is historically, socially and culturally constructed. The point of focusing on anti-anti-Semitism is to evaluate the conceptual and perceptual "biases" that animate the opposition to anti-Semitism. Second, I want to show how anti-anti-Semitism partially overlaps with philosemite's imaginary and symbolic idealization of "the Jews", which is used as a fantasy mirror to construct the philosemite's own identity through a process of identification. Third, I want to elucidate the danger of anti-anti-Semitism, which, often more or less, reverses the dictums of anti-Semitism without problematizing the system of values, ideology or dogma that underpins anti-Semitism, and can thereby end up duplicating aspects of the problem that anti-anti-Semites seek to resist.


The Sartrean influence marks much of Memmi's work, but is most clearly exemplified in his Portrait d'un juif (Portrait of a Jew, trans. Elisabeth Abbott, New York: Orion Press, 1960. Memmi's Portrait was dedicated to Sartre (along with Memmi's Chadôzim comrades) and serves to reissue the limits of Sartre's Réflexions, by considering the role not only of anti-Semitism, but the impact of the multifaceted dimensions of history and culture on the construction of Jewish identity.

Robert Misrahi was a student of Sartre's and later a professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne who wrote a series of articles on Jews and Israel that were published in Les

9. While I do not know of a sustained discussion in Neber’s work of Sarte’s Reflexions, he cites Sarte, along with Memmi and Muzahri as significant sociological contributors in understanding “La dialectique de l’identité juive” in his Clés pour le judaïsme. Paris: Seghera, 1971, p. 52. As a great biblical scholar and Jewish philosopher grounded in the Jewish textual and cultural traditions, his own approach is far removed from Sarte’s. Nevertheless his conceptual vocabulary and existentialism certainly echo traces of Sarte’s influence. See, for example, his discussion of the “Dialectics of the Jewish Conditions”, in André Neber, They Make Their Souls Aware, trans. David Mainel, New York: SUNY Press, 1990, which in part is construed as a dialectic of “Being for Oneself” and “Being With Go Others.”


13. See Goldman, Dim Memoires, p. 17.

14. See Goldman, Dim Memoires, p. 16.
18. Aaron, Les juifs d'extrême gauche, p. 82.

16. On 21 May at the height of the May movement, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the leaders of the protests, was refused re-entry into France since he only held a German passport. After heavy protests in the Latin Quarter against this decision, the Gaullist and Communist press evoked suggestions about Cohn-Bendit’s Jewishness and emphasized that he was German, a foreigners, and undesirable. In a significant response, two demonstrations were held in Paris on 24 May. The protesters took their rally cry: “Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands” from the posters made by the action committee at the École des Beaux-Arts. There were two posters that showed Cohn-Bendit’s face, one with the inscription, “Nous sommes tous ‘indivisibles’” (we are all indivisible) and the other which stated “Nous sommes tous des juifs et des allemands.” In their support of Cohn-Bendit the students thus identified with German-Jews and undesirable and consequently associated the Gaulists and the communists with the paranoidist Vichy regime.

17. Sartre was the founder and director of the literary, philosophical and political journal Les Temps modernes, which was a major intellectual review in the post-war period that continues today under the direction of Claude Lanzmann. Libération, today France’s major daily leftist newspaper, emerged out the conglomeration of revolutionary publications of the late sixties and was started with money and the involvement of Sartre as director in 1973, who gave the initiative credibility. Libération was the daily expression and reflection of the sensibilities of the New Left.


20. Cited in Friedlander, Vièta on the Seine, p. 37. Alain Krivine, leader of the largest Trotskyite group Ligue Communiste révolutionnaire said in a later interview, “He symbolized this generation in a particularly moving way; he incarnated our generation” (Aaron, Les juiifs d’extrême gauche, p. 313).


22. Jean-Paul Sartre, L’être et le néant: Essai d’ontologie phénoménologique, Paris: Gallimard, 1943, p. 799: “A freedom which wills itself freedom is in fact a being-which-is-not-what-it-is and which-is-what-it-is-not, and which chooses as the ideal of being, being-what-it-is-not and not-being-what-it-is.”

23. Jean-Paul Sartre, L’être et le néant, p. 182.


27. See Aaron, Les juiifs d’extrême gauche en mai 68.


30. In both Sartre’s sense articulated in the Réflexions and in the more conventional sense of an “essential authenticity”. This is a different reading of Finkielkraut than that suggested by Stuart Charmí who develops the distinction between “existential authenticity” and “essentialist authenticity” in “Varieties of authenticity in contemporary Jewish identity”, Jewish Social Studies, 6 (2000), pp. 133–155.
(Re)Locating Redemption. Jerusalem: The Wall, Two Mountains, a Hill and
the Narrative Construction of the Third Temple

Maor Azaryahu

An important aspect of making Jewish Jerusalem the national capital of modern Israel was its re-invention in Zionist (and profoundly secular) terms following Israel's independence. The relocation of national institutions, for example, ministries and parliament (Knesset) to the national capital asserted Jewish Jerusalem as the political centre of the State of Israel. However, new shrines of national remembrance built in the capital not only belonged to the emerging symbolic foundations of the Jewish State, but also invested Jerusalem with quintessentially Zionist meanings. In particular, these shrines of national remembrance that integrated the theme of national revival into the landscape of the national capital belonged to the Zionist discourse of national redemption. Moreover, in this symbolic capacity, they enabled and celebrated the Zionist narrative of the Third Temple as an account of Jewish history culminating in the restoration of Jewish nationality in the historical Jewish homeland.

In Jewish consciousness, Jerusalem was traditionally associated with profound religious beliefs and powerful eschatological notions of redemption. According to Jewish religious tradition, redemption is understood as a messianic-eschatological procedure that, linked to a "divine plan", is bound to culminate with the "ingathering of the exiles" in the land of the ancestors and the restoration of both the Temple and its rituals and the House of David. In contrast to the notion of collective redemption as a messianic and eschatological procedure, modern political Zionism reformulated collective redemption in terms of national revival. In its Zionist interpretation, the redemptive process entailed the return to the land and the restoration of Jewish nationality, where the restored State of Israel represents the Third Temple. With the construction of prominent shrines of national remembrance that conflated Jewish history with Zionist notions of national redemption, Jewish Jerusalem was invested with Zionist meanings. Depending on perspective, these meanings either challenged or complemented the traditional version of redemption that the Western Wall represented and evoked.