Introduction

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This book is concerned with a pivotal moment of history in France, the first ten years of political and social reconstruction after the end of World War II. It is a period that was crucial to the restoration of a Jewish population and cultural presence in France after years of persecution and destruction, and it involved such immediate tasks as the reunification of families and communities, restitution of property and resources, and reestablishment of rescinded rights. But it is equally a decade that involved major developments that came to challenge the very notion of a restoration of order, to the extent that it changed the enshrined and understood relationship between France and Jews. For in betraying Jews in France through the implementation of anti-Semitic policies and the facilitation of murder, the Vichy state also broke the powerful pact of republican assimilation. This pact had distinguished the particular French model of Jewish emancipation sometimes called Franco-Judaism. It conferred on Jews a theoretical equality arising out of secularist and universalist principles that effectively insisted on public invisibility as a distinct grouping. Significantly, however, protection of Jews during the Vichy and occupation period had come overwhelmingly from nonstatist sources, and in the immediate postwar period the particular mistreatment of Jews was subsumed within an official narrative of an indivisible France that remained united in a collective experience and in reconstructive efforts. One observable consequence of this approach was a conscious and isolatable form of public self-organization among Jews in postwar France that was new to the country’s modern history. The decade in question therefore saw a rapid proliferation of societies, agencies, and schools of thought devoted to the open articulation of particular visions and community identities for Jews in France, where previously any distinctiveness had
been subsumed, more often than not willingly, under the powerful assimilationist ethos of the French republican model. This fundamental shift was thereafter to become further propelled by subsequent postwar events of international significance, and especially those relating to decolonization and to post–Cold War geopolitics, which not only altered France’s demographic makeup, including that of its identifiable Jewish population, but also tested again the historical notions of allegiance, loyalty, and cultural affiliation for Jews in France.

Yet, for all the fundamental significance of these changes in the relationship between France and Jews, this is a decade that has often been somewhat overlooked until now. The reasons for this are perhaps obvious: momentous international events take place before and after the period in question, combined with the desire in both political circles and survivors’ mentalities to leave behind shameful and traumatic events and focus instead on national reconstruction and hopeful emotions. Unsurprisingly, historical accounts can repeat this effect when they return to the drama and uncertainty of the wartime period. They therefore tend to focus on the treatment of Jews that for so long remained insufficiently acknowledged by official accounts, and then move forward rapidly to review such dramatic moments of change as the significant immigration of North African Jews to France caused by the Algerian war of 1954–62 and more generally by the region’s decolonization, or to observe the tense conflict in loyalties and identifications produced by the events of the Six-Day War in 1967, including in reaction to comments made by significant figures such as Charles de Gaulle.²

To accept these large historical moments as defining, however, is also to internalize a certain timetable set in motion initially by the very synthesizing Gaullist narrative of wartime efforts and postwar will, and therefore to overlook those fundamentally significant efforts made in many different quarters to restore the life, culture, and institutions of French Jewry in the immediate postwar period. Indeed, we could say that these movements were themselves to affect subsequent international shifts. It is therefore the aim of this volume to focus on the key relevant activities and ideas relating to the years 1945–55 in order to provide a fuller and truer picture of the relationship between France and the Jews on its soil at a moment of complex renovation.
At the beginning of the occupation, Jews in France numbered over 300,000. Almost two-thirds of them lived in Paris, and 190,000 were French citizens. Of the 76,000 deported from France during the war, fewer than 5 percent were to return. This does leave some 200,000 who did survive the destruction, and their numbers were to be augmented further by refugees immediately after the war, as well as at key moments thereafter. (Polls conducted in 2012 estimated the number of Jews resident in France to be between 483,000 and 600,000, making them the third-largest national grouping after citizens of Israel and the United States.) This is the size of the postwar population, then, that was to be affected by the tasks of wholesale institutional and psychological reconstruction. These tasks were undertaken by a rapidly proliferating number of committees, special operations, and purposeful individuals, whose actions and efforts took place within a period of continuing hardship and competing claims to immediate assistance. By focusing on this time, and especially by highlighting the efforts of significant Jewish organizations, large-scale related planning, and associated intellectual reconstruction, we achieve a much more continuous and informed understanding of the life, contribution, and significance of Jews in France in the postwar era. We can also note immediately that such reconstructive efforts served a difficult dual function in relation to Jewish identity. On the one hand, such identity could be naturally of a wholly practical and concrete nature, concerning, for example, the key issue of saved orphans whose psychological as well as physical welfare was forever affected by their experience. On the other hand, the question of identity effectively also had to assume the equally fundamental task of attempting to conceptualize the events that had taken place, and to propose a range of intellectual and identificatory solutions for Jewish life and culture in France and Europe. This is a task that we see enacted by such influential postwar figures as Emmanuel Levinas, Léon Poliakov, and André Neher. At both levels of activity, this kind of work came to assume a fundamental significance for any continuing sense of French republicanism, since these efforts effectively created a subtle shifting of weight between the coexisting dual identities of Jewish French citizen, on the one hand, and French Jew, on the other hand. This is not at all to suggest that French Jews necessarily abandoned the republican model of
assimilationist identity. It is notable that postwar Jews did not relocate in significant numbers from France to Israel; and in seeking to isolate some of the reasons why this was so, we can do no better than to review the position of René Cassin, who provides an unambiguous reassertion of commitment to the traditional French concept of citizenship. But it remains equally true that the assimilationist model was thrown into crisis by the events of the Shoah in France, just as it has been further tested on subsequent occasions when official adherence to republican indivisibility and neutrality momentarily slipped in relation to attitudes toward Jews. In this aspect also, then, the immediate postwar period, in terms of accommodation and reaction, was effectively a foundational one for the contemporary complexities of Jewish identification and affiliation in France.

Organizing Complexity

The focused study of this period, which involved an internationally coordinated approach to recovery and planning, immediately highlights the complexity and interactivity of all sociopolitical renewal in France, including for Jews. The tasks and events reviewed here were also occurring at a time when the end of World War II was widely felt to have inaugurated a potentially more deadly struggle for European domination that eventually was to settle into Cold War vigilance. Our focus therefore has the additional benefit of locating itself at a key moment of urgent and uncertain interactivity affecting not just France’s national self-identity but also Europe’s new transnational humanitarian and strategic concerns. David Weinberg’s chapter makes an essential point when it emphasizes, among other details, how, from the devastation of France’s religious and lay leadership, there arose an organizational will. By virtue of having survived the Holocaust in France, and being also at the heart of postwar allied operations with a heightened moral status, this organizational will made France the natural locus for forms of concerted Jewish activism that were also European, North American, and Zionist in their scope, address, and resources. This meant that new forms of French Jewish autonomy and internationalist self-identification arose powerfully in a period of geopolitical flux, wherein traditional structures and allegiances in France nevertheless wished to reassert
themselves. The resulting complexity interestingly highlights how the transnational organizations that became important agents during this time were an early instance of the fundamental shifts in power that would begin to develop rapidly in postwar globalizing politics. As a result, we can appreciate how the French-based activities of the Conseil représentatif des israélites de France (CRIF), or the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or “the Joint”), or the American Jewish Committee (AJC) ultimately held ramifications that extended well beyond their precise initial concerns. Such organizational activity therefore certainly affected the self-perceptions of French Jewry, and it arguably affected the broader image of France’s exceptionalism. Several of the chapters in this book therefore refer naturally to the existence and activities of such organizations, some of which were financed significantly via the JDC. To isolate just a few examples: the Comité juif d’action sociale et de reconstruction (COJASOR) assisted surviving or returning Jews; the Fonds juif social unifié (FSJU) evolved from initial refugee support to more wholesale orchestration of a French social, educational, and cultural Jewish presence in response to decolonization’s effects; the Conseil représentatif du judaïsme traditionnaliste de France (CRJTF) looked to create Jewish youth centers, kindergartens, or holiday camps; the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO) took an internationalist perspective on restitutions; and the Centre de documentation juive contemporaine (CDJC) during the war itself began to compile documentary evidence of war crimes against Jews that would be cited in the Nuremberg trials, before becoming part of the archives of the Mémorial de la Shoah located in Paris. Such new forms of affiliation and planning were in addition, of course, to the transformed aims of other long-established organizations. One of the most important of these was undoubtedly the Paris-based Alliance israélite universelle (AIU), founded in 1860 to preserve the rights of Jews throughout the world via education. In the postwar period its politics shifted toward Zionism, even if de Gaulle typically viewed the Middle East presence of the AIU as also serving French colonial interests. A further example is the Oeuvre des secours aux enfants (OSE). Originally founded in 1912 by doctors in St. Petersburg as an organization designed to protect the health of needy Jews, during the war it had housed and assisted Jewish refugee children; but today it works in a much broader arena involving health, sociomedical,
and educational support for Jewish populations, and as such works in partnership in several eastern European countries as well as in Israel.

The chapter by Samuel Ghiles-Meilhac detailing the founding fortunes of the CRIF during this period provides one valuable focus on the multiplicity of issues and choices which we can see would have affected the organizational will that emerged at this historical point. From the moment of its wartime inception, which itself was already contextualized by the history of interwar competition for Jewish political affiliation, the CRIF’s mission of speaking for all French Jewry instituted a fundamental change in the historical nature of French Jewish identification, in terms of both organization and political univocity. While the Central Consistory, the body governing Jewish congregations, looked at that time to retain internal control (it left the present-day CRIF in 2004), the alliance of often divergent political visions united such different figures as Léon Meiss (then head of the Consistory), Isaac Schneersohn (cofounder of the CDJC), and Robert Gamson (founder of the French Jewish scouting movement) around instances of anti-Semitism. Indeed, one of these instances involved early judgment of the possible moral culpability of the Union générale des israélites de France (UGIF), a wartime French Jewish council or Judenrat recognized by a Vichy law of November 29, 1941. Out of this internal politics, however, and quickly moving beyond judgment of the war years, it found itself adopting international positions on Palestine and Israel, postwar rearmament, and Cold War politics, though without necessarily cohering around one common vision or creating common cause with organizations such as the AIU. The general effect during this decade was therefore to begin a process of shifting the collective voice away from a neutrality in keeping with a French assimilationist instinct, and toward the status of being an official French affiliate to the World Jewish Congress and an influential organ in French political life, a position the CRIF occupies today.

In a similar vein, the chapter by Lisa Leff traces a parallel shift in relations between Jewish organizations and the state during this time, concerning how the postwar insistence on republican “race-blind” policies could also generate major restitutitional injustices, including where purloined items such as artworks were treated as national rather than private property. The case of book looting and restoration here provides
a particularly fascinating study of the precise mechanisms and decisions that came into play when works were treated simultaneously as French patrimony (irrespective of a work’s origins) and as the heart of a particular Jewish community or society. As Leff shows, the interactive and diplomatic nature of much of the expeditionary and attributive work therefore involved the maintenance of a delicate partnership between bodies such as the AIU and the French state, in a way that seemed to maintain the historical assimilated position of Franco-Judaism and yet to acknowledge a cultural particularism whose untypical nature was justified as needs-driven but perhaps signaled a new relationship. In counterpoint to this, Maud Mandel’s study of the contemporary tensions and transformations created by immigrant arrivals for the predominant character of Franco-Judaism usefully stresses how the disruptions of the Shoah and World War II did not necessarily overturn all traditional internal notions of difference, but rather perhaps laid the conditions for an accommodation of the equally dramatic development of French Jewry following the further immigrant influx arising in particular from France’s decolonizations. Mandel traces all the organizational attempts to articulate and govern these changes in a way that brings out how the Consistory and the CRIF themselves needed to acknowledge entrenched exclusivist attitudes among the historical Jewish population. These attitudes could be seen to reaffirm the national neutralism of Franco-Judaism and simultaneously to betray a snobbery and fear regarding how association with unassimilated groups might undo certain historically acquired benefits. In a fascinating reflection of changes occurring at the national level, this complex reaction produced both a continuing rhetorical adherence to assimilation and the beginnings of a more pluralist sensibility that would, for example, allow consideration of greater institutional decentralization as the price for retaining unity within a broader Consistory. Mandel ultimately isolates two key factors in this transformation which also acted as a profound influence on the entire French nation in the postwar period: the general “Americanization” that was accelerated in this case by JDC funding, and which challenged and overtook older sectarian divisions; and the dramatic revitalization of French Jewish spirituality by North African immigration.
Uses and Abuses of Children

The chapters by Daniella Doron, Susan Suleiman, and Lucille Cairns collectively highlight one exemplary instance of the complex consequences of immediate reconstruction, namely, the operations and aims associated with the plight of Jewish orphans after the war. Approximately 10,000 Jewish children were deprived of one or both of their parents, with as many as 7,000 placed in Jewish children’s homes at the Liberation. As 40 percent of these children had one surviving parent, the situation was further complicated by the economic circumstances of surviving relatives. As with other problems, this issue was overdetermined by the specifics of the political context: France had to deal not just with a national version of postwar restoration, but also with the intricacies of simultaneous adherence to anti-Semitic hatred by Vichy and resistance to those operations by ordinary citizens. Given the destruction of families through war, the inclusion of children in roundups and deportation by Vichy officials, and the concealment by French people of Jewish children under threat, the plight of children was to provide an obvious focal point for multiple and sometimes conflicting thoughts of restorative justice. Inevitably, as Doron discusses, the issue quickly became politicized, with the condition of innocent and vulnerable children being co-opted not just by contesting narratives of martyrdom, but also by broader forms of exculpation and universalization. This was a period marked dramatically by the so-called Finaly affair (1948–53), a legal dispute involving the Consistory that played out against the background of a Vatican instruction, wherein two Jewish boys from Grenoble whose parents had been deported were cared for by a Catholic who initially refused to return the children to their aunts on the grounds that they were now Catholics. In the midst of this instrumentalization, as Suleiman brings out in detail, the French context also entailed the further psychological complications associated with a whole generation of Jewish children who had survived the war by dint of being hidden in France by non-Jewish families, and for whom subsequent conflicts of emotional identification and narrative understanding remained unresolved, sometimes to the present day. Inner conflict and religious identity became intertwined, creating a French Jewish memory that was effectively denied forms of “working through” during the period. Sulei-
man endorses the view of Annette Wieviorka and other historians that, because of the general public attitude, this situation did not change until after the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann. This meant that for these young survivors psychological conflict was to remain as a foundational complex for the postwar era, resulting in later eruptions around such moments as the Six-Day War, where one’s French and Jewish identity again became potentially opposed. These unresolved complications, which play out a tension between memory and history that occupied French historiography from the 1970s on, are intimately charted by Lucille Cairns in her reading of personal testimonies by hidden Jewish girls. Both their accounts and the related research highlight the sheer diversity of the problem. Orphanages could have distinct regimes, aims, and therapeutic practices, whether because of a director’s personality or because of the different secular, religious, and ideological identities of the organization involved. Beyond this, though, there were also broader implications relating to the source of financial support, such as the JDC, and even to the fact that the French Jewish community, perhaps regarding the orphaned child as an unwelcome link to the past or simply as an impossible additional burden, itself sometimes displayed a dereliction of duty. An associated fact is that approximately 5 percent of the total Jewish population in France between 1947 and 1950 undertook a change of patronymic, a figure that doubles if one includes Jews who adopted a gallicized patronymic on acquiring French citizenship. Such recorded name changing was six times higher in the period 1945–57 than in the whole of the period from 1808 (when Napoleon I decreed that all Jews had to adopt a fixed patronymic) and 1939. Cairns also advances the interesting thesis that the analyzed memoirs seem progressively more generous as the events recede into the past, suggesting a longer-term resolution of trauma that among other things confirms the idea that the immediate postwar period provided no accessible psychological framework for recovery and rehabilitation. By focusing, then, on the hugely compelling cases of the Jewish orphans produced by the persecutions, extermination policy, and war, and by including in their study the continuing conflict generated by subsequent propaganda campaigns, traumatic identity formation, and unresolved tension between personal memory and public history, these chapters underscore powerfully again the key point that this period not only saw the attempted management
of immediate concerns, but also anticipated a postwar age of multipolar belonging. The effects of this conflicted sense of allegiance were to be registered belatedly in France by later generations, whether via political adherence or by way of complex narrative constructions that attempted to express the intricacies of “postmemory” identity.  

One Nation, One Narrative

The resolutions of Jewish agencies and authorities during this period were fundamentally contextualized by the political and economic problems besetting the French Fourth Republic, which ran constitutionally from 1946 to 1958. From September 1944, when the government assumed the task of rebuilding a nation still at war, and so favored the armaments and associated infrastructural industries over domestic shortages, France used national resurgence to dismiss self-examination. This era was above all to be one of rapid economic and institutional regrowth in both France and Europe. There were some key achievements in the period, notably relating to the establishment of comprehensive social security and health care systems. But the government was also dogged from the beginning by its immediate history, tense relations with General de Gaulle, and an unstable ministerial balancing act that sought to maintain a three-way party alliance. It was also being driven along at the same time by the multiple ideals of European unity and the epochal collapse of colonial empire. In this new landscape, the capacity and will of the government to assume full responsibility for the Shoah, and to confront its profoundly altered relationship with the Jewish population, were arguably already limited by these immediate politicoeconomic priorities, as well as by unwillingness or inability to acknowledge the national nature of betrayal.

One key effect was that the particular treatment of Jews during the Vichy and occupation years became categorized as a precise wartime event that could therefore be addressed and settled by the épuration or purging process that largely took place between 1944 and 1945. “Order, efficiency, and justice” were de Gaulle’s stated priorities in a liberation speech made at the Palais de Chaillot on September 12, 1944, and at one level this list was clearly being stated in terms of relative importance.  

Indeed, the prevailing conditions arguably militated
against any sympathy for Jewish survivors of France’s war record, who in some quarters were still tenaciously identified as entirely foreign, and whose return from the camps or exile could therefore be represented as an added burden rather than as a consequence of the state’s culpability. Indirect factors further fueled this sentiment: the resolute Gaullist presentation of France as a unified resistant wartime force that had never betrayed itself even in its darkest moments, and the ambivalence about the assistance and continuing presence of the United States on French soil (which flared up, for example, over military decisions taken at the moment of the recapture of the city of Strasbourg at the beginning of 1945), encouraged and mobilized a general chauvinism that vaguely legitimated dismissal of the treatment of Jews.9

These tendencies were already primed, moreover, by the experience of ordinary French citizens during the initial period when prisoners and deportees liberated by Allied forces gradually returned home. The word experience is here salient, for plainly the national narrative of united resistance and self-won triumph in the face of external threats was flatly contradicted by the complex and compromised reality that refugees embodied. Of the 5 million people of different categories who had to find their way home and attempt to rebuild lives, 700,000 were actually Service du travail obligatoire (STO) workers, that is, “compulsory work service” laborers who were returning from mostly forced employment in German factories. Their status as a Vichy-requisitioned nonresistant workforce complicated the notion of refugee for state propaganda and ordinary citizen alike. Moreover, the logistics associated with returning prisoners, deportees, workers, and survivors at one level were regarded as hampering the continuing war effort’s need to ration resources such as transportation, medical facilities, and liaison work. In addition, attitudes to this situation were made even more conflicted by the requirement to scrutinize returnees for any cases of criminality or collaboration. As de Gaulle suggested in the same Palais de Chaillot liberation speech, anything that was not obviously building for the future was implicitly a “waste.”10 In this context, the situation of those Jews liberated from extermination camps, which could have been acknowledged as irrefutable local evidence of the Holocaust, was instead widely treated as indistinguishable from that of non-Jews returning from concentration camps. As such, the experience of Jews here was
treated as one detail of an organizational problem concerning the movements of over a million people, which was dealt with by the significantly named Ministry of Prisoners, Deportees and Refugees over a mere nine months lasting up to June 1945.

From our present perspective, then, a highly significant element of the story of post-Holocaust France and the Jews concerns how even the return of Jewish refugees involved a lack of official or emotional recognition of a specific kind. The stories of surviving deportees, especially Jewish but also non-Jewish, seemed for a long time destined to remain unembraced by national or communal understanding. As a result, the intellectual processing of what had taken place was effectively left in the early years to certain key individuals whose work sometimes was colored by the politicized nature of the Nuremberg trials or the ideological motivations of political groupings. It is a significant fact, for example, that one of the best-known early attempts at a lucid expression of experience, David Rousset’s *L’univers concentrationnaire*, is not specifically Jewish in its account of the Nazi extermination machine. Indeed, its insistence on a universalist and antifascist thesis was implicitly the refutation of any specifically Jewish category of genocide. As demonstrated subsequently by the concerted vilification of Rousset as an agent provocateur during the period when he exposed the existence of the Soviet gulags and helped in 1950 to found an international commission against concentration camps, the events related to survival and return were generally subordinated to the political imperatives of the day, which themselves were soon dominated by Cold War realpolitik. In other words, there was no special desire on the part of any major political faction, including the Communist Party, as well as those on the political right or in the Gaullist camp, to highlight the plight of Jewish deportees. The Communists’ wish, for example, to exploit the credibility of résistant status led them to redefine Auschwitz as an essentially political prison. And it should also be noted in passing that there were certainly anti-Semitic members of the Resistance, just as anti-Semitism had not of itself defined the core political position of the Vichy regime, in contrast to that of the Third Reich. This does not, of course, obscure the fact that, as Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton pointed out to a still recalcitrant French audience, Vichy’s anti-Semitic machine gave more support to the German extermination program than did Germany’s allies Hungary and Romania.
Thinking beyond the Shoah

The Holocaust has undoubtedly presented the greatest challenge to Western philosophy in its modern history, not only in terms of understanding, but also in terms of the emergence of the events and their justification from within supposedly enlightened cultures. The narrative vacuum in the immediate postwar years in France consequently called forth a variety of key attempts at Jewish intellectual reconstruction that offered both radical revisions of Western philosophical assumptions and a series of equally bold postulations, whether of a philosophical or of a more broadly activist category. The chapters by Bruno Chaouat, Jonathan Judaken, and Edward Kaplan progressively map out for us the broad contemplation of this challenge in the immediate environment by a number of major intellectual figures. As a result of their work, significant developments for a renewed or invented vision of modern French Jewish thought then begin to take place. Chaouat’s review of an intense period of intellectual reaction, covering only a few years in the late 1940s, looks at how surviving thinkers such as Rousset set out to understand the problem of evil and to acknowledge how the conditions had also permanently changed for philosophy. His chapter tellingly finishes by noting some of the key innovations in philosophical categories produced by Emmanuel Levinas immediately after the war, when he clearly wishes to unwrite the Heideggerian language of ontology and authenticity that for him has become tainted with Nazi associations. In our present context we can add to this reading how the conclusion to Levinas’s *Time and the Other*, originally delivered as lectures shortly after the end of the war, significantly introduces an ethical message of vulnerability or absence of virility, and the almost visionary advent of a new child, which stand as the rekindling of both philosophical and social aspirations. Judaken’s account of Léon Poliakov’s foundational work of Holocaust studies, the 1951 *Bréviaire de la haine*, also highlights the intertwined nature of intellectual and social reconstruction, pointing up Poliakov’s close connections to the industrialist Isaac Schneerson (a founder of the CDJC and instigator of the Paris World Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr), his role as head of research at the CDJC (which published several of Poliakov’s works), and his important interactions with emblematic Catholic thinkers such as François Mauriac and Jacques Maritain who sought to promote
Jewish-Christian intellectual and spiritual reconciliation. Judaken more particularly pursues the acute significance of the ambiguous thesis of Christophobia in the Bréviaire, showing how intertextually it works with Sigmund Freud, Maritain, and Maurice Samuel in order to achieve a complex articulation of the causes of anti-Semitism that offers postsecular reconciliation, but also locates Jewish identity within a Christianizing metanarrative. Finally, Kaplan’s account of the contribution of André Neher to a renewed Jewish intellectual activism in postwar France details some of the highly significant ideological contests, not least for postwar identification for French Jews, reflected in Neher’s 1947 doctoral thesis on the prophet Amos (which was dedicated to friends and teachers who were shot or deported). Here we can see that prophetic action is privileged over finite questions of freedom or justice, and Israel is presented as the nation that is exemplarily marked by a perpetually renewable covenant or berith. Kaplan goes on to show how, in this and subsequent works such as the 1956 Moses and the Vocation of the Jewish People, Neher sought to generate a vigorously activist response to the Holocaust and to questions of historical continuity for French-language Jews. As part of this mission, Neher therefore promoted the revival of a traditional Judaism via such initiatives as the foundation in 1946 of the Jewish École des cadres Gilbert Bloch at Orsay by Robert Gamzon, Jacob Gordin, and Léon Ashkenazi. Later, Neher was also to be a key founding member of the annual Colloquium of French-Language Jewish Intellectuals, inaugurated in 1957. Levinas and Neher, described as the colloquium’s “soul and foundation,” each year traditionally contributed a Talmudic reading and a biblical exegesis, respectively. Neher’s work here points up for us how the republican existential narrative posed particular problems for a Jewish intellectual response, and how one response to this, which evidently disagreed with a Sartrean solution, but also with Poliakov’s more integrated theorizing, was an enthusiastic renewal of tradition. Such a return to sources, adopted as an intellectual as well as an affective solution, also significantly restored an overarching religious perspective, in which even the Shoah could be understood as part of a greater dynamic.

Notwithstanding the production of such core challenges to French Jewish intellectual assimilationism, it is important to note that another conclusion could involve reaffirmation of the republican model. No
better representative of this position exists than René Cassin. As Jay Winter shows, Cassin worked not only to develop a postwar internationalist governance epitomized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also to restore the integrity and confidence of republican assimilationist values. At one level, this was logical, as it was through his wartime work with de Gaulle’s France libre that he was asked to assume the presidency of the AIU, along with a series of governmental or international duties. These included being the first president of the Council of the École nationale d’administration, established by de Gaulle in 1945 to train a new meritocratic breed of senior civil servant, and later being president of the European Court of Human Rights. But Winter details Cassin’s efforts, over a thirty-three-year period as president, to generate systemic improvement and significant extension of the AIU. Much of this could involve quite detailed operational matters as well as much broader sociopolitical aims; all of it was nonetheless significantly pursued always along secular and republican lines. As Winter puts it, Cassin was effectively the foreign minister of Francophone Jewry, and as such projected a thorough identification with France as a universalist and enlightening instrument, while negotiating with American funders, arguing for preservation of the status of AIU schools in the new State of Israel, or seeking to protect North African Jewry at the time of decolonization. Elie Wiesel notes at one point in “To Be a Jew” that the postwar moment in France seemed to present a Jew with the extreme options of “total commitment or total alienation, unconditional loyalty or repudiation.”16 French Jews had indeed every reason to lose faith in the republican model of integration. But René Cassin’s reply to the anguished search for a new narrative of Franco-Judaic identity was to seek to embody everything for which he felt the republican model ultimately still stood.

Surviving Change

In time, the “resistentialist” myth of a France united against an external oppressor was subjected to a critique that itself sometimes proposed an equally extreme contradiction to the Gaullist narrative. Since the publication of Rousso’s Vichy Syndrome, which presented collusion and guilt as pervasive, this countervailing tendency has become qualified to account better for the various and complex forms of involvement and
survival. In keeping with this more nuanced perspective, then, we should note that desire for restorative justice and institutional reestablishment for Jews during the postwar period had to combat not only a political reluctance to acknowledge involvement and the psychological tensions inherent in recollection of persecution and betrayal, but also the general population’s basic exhaustion. Conditions for ordinary French citizens continued to be grim after the war. Almost 50 percent of the transport network, involving roads, railways, and bridges, had been destroyed, often by allies and the resistance, and 80 percent of all lorries had been put out of action. Petrol and coal (still France’s first fuel) were in short supply and expensive. The accumulated poor diet and bad harvests caused by the terrible winter of 1944–45 combined with a shortage of machinery and fertilizer to make agricultural growth similarly hard, meaning that bread rationing continued until 1949. Added to this was a set of conditions guaranteed to produce both inflation and the “moral destruction” of a flourishing black market that continued with occupation practice. Taken together, these conditions prioritized national infrastructural operations to the detriment of the individual citizen, who was left sometimes malnourished as well as frustrated. This policy was, moreover, endorsed by all the main political factions, including the French Communist Party, which treated increased production as a means to berate and disempower the reactionary political and financial forces rewarded by Vichy. The rapid, almost improvisatory, nationalization of companies such as Renault, or of air traffic companies that eventually became Air France, could be felt to serve both these ends, therefore, since not only could productivity supposedly be centrally controlled, but economic collaboration with the German occupation could also be punished through sequestration. With the speedy nature of this dirigiste increase in production, however, came not just a less controllable inflationary wage-price spiral, but a quick return to reliance on autonomous management, whatever its immediate political past. In fact, this overwhelming drive to increase production via an idiosyncratic nationalization created a fundamental blurring of extreme political objectives, ranging from sovietism to technocratism. The attempt to balance this particular mixture of intervention and liberalism, and to modernize France’s economy (in part by acquiring resource-rich German territory, thus again combining restoration with punishment) for the postwar period, was to give rise
to the Monnet Plan of 1946–50, in which the structural shortcomings of France’s performance were identified via a statistical approach to demography and economics that again relied without irony on the development of such tools under the Vichy regime. The solutions presented involved productivist targets that in addition to use of German coal crucially involved reliance on Marshall Plan aid to hold down inflation, as well as nationalized use of the banks. The benefits flowed primarily to the major industries and capital production, and especially energy and transport services, and much less so to building and agriculture, meaning that continuing shortages and deprivation in housing and food were still experienced by an exhausted and sometimes polarized civilian population. The attempts to survive this period of structural recovery, shortage, and inflation were therefore eventually to replace the collectivist will of the Liberation period with a technocratic economic liberalism.

Some later accounts of this period, themselves a form of counternarrative, were to bitterly denounce how the idealism and goals of the Resistance became so swiftly sidelined. One downbeat truth indirectly acknowledged here is that the Resistance was a narrative construct as well as an actual physical struggle, and as such would be necessarily overtaken and smothered by the Gaullist monologue of postwar reassertion. It is all the same true that the revolutionary potentiality of 1944, with Communism poised for potential takeover, rapidly evaporated, in part as the French Communist Party obediently accepted Moscow’s preference for a fundamental defeat of Germany and the quick restoration of a France that could limit postwar Anglo-Saxon dominance. In essence, then, this initial period was not only experienced but was also instantaneously narrated as one of a general ongoing struggle that had to deal with both infrastructural and human damage as well as with emerging geopolitical challenges. It is therefore understandable, however unsatisfying, that a judgment of the collaboration period, let alone France’s assistance in the persecution of Jews during that period, might be dispatched in a statist and sometimes cynical manner. Contrary to what some résistants hoped, the period did not initiate a wholesale social revolution, for which the situation and treatment of Jews might indeed have acted as a catalyst.

The purges of 1944–45 therefore enacted a determining pragmatism. The Liberation period had naturally unleashed the fears of a civilian
population pressurized by occupation and collaboration, which expressed themselves in a wave of furious reprisals conducted against collaborators, informers, traitors, and profiteers. Political feeling was inevitably mixed in with more personal and internecine instances of score settling. Mob rule and summary executions, perhaps amounting to 9,000 cases, occurring in a country still at war, rapidly became a problem for national orchestration. De Gaulle’s memos of the day show how seriously destabilizing these uncontrolled outbreaks were felt to be.\(^9\) The government therefore quickly moved to reassure allies and control sentiments by shifting power from military tribunals to civil authority, and by instituting the largely pacifying processes of internship, protective custody, and verification commissions. Beyond the reduction in revenge killings, other consequences of this deliberate restraining included using trials of prominent figures (with a populist focus, for example, on well-known entertainers) as a collective cure. This kind of theater also permitted the relative exculpation of still-useful but nationally irrelevant figures, meaning that punishment was disproportionately meted out to whomever did not fall into an administrative or industrial specialization. And it simultaneously began to demonize stubborn résistants as antipatriotic agitators and disrupters. This whole process was intentionally brief as well as slow: by the end of 1948, almost 70 percent of condemned cases had been released, and the dismantling of the courts at the beginning of 1951 passed unnoticed. This had the further effect of defining the crimes of Vichy and collaboration overwhelmingly in terms of isolatable actions and individual allegiances, rather than as instances of a generally sustained context for which France as a whole could be held accountable. In keeping with the republican vision of France as indivisibly resistant to aggression and betrayal from World War I to the moment of its self-liberation in 1944, true recognition of a national crime against Jewish inhabitants therefore became marginalized as antithetical to the story of national renewal, and was dealt with inadequately as one feature of the Vichy aberration. In addition, a strange countertendency even set itself in motion: with the Gaullist narrative insisting that responsibility for wartime atrocities lay only with foreign invaders, the summary punishment that was handed out to French citizens, and especially to those women who had engaged sexually with German soldiers, soon attracted nega-
tive public reaction in France and abroad. The often lurid presentation of these individuals as victims of excessive violence certainly helped the governmental desire to control maquisard justice. But in the process, it also helped to steer attention away from the victims of state-supported persecution and extermination, and it even hastened the rehabilitation of right-wing factions that in turn depicted themselves graphically as the new victims of injustice.

Finally, it is worth pointing up again how the war campaign, and the insistence that military actions involving American or British forces late in the conflict should always be subordinated to the needs of the French state, gave de Gaulle immense currency at the moment of the country’s newly gained independence and of his subsequent temporary resignation. As we have repeatedly stressed, this meant that focus on the state’s treatment of Jews was always going to be implicitly categorized as a distracting detail, given de Gaulle’s imperious dismissal of all “interests, passions or quarrels which might interfere with the rise of France.” De Gaulle’s continuing influence would additionally have lasting consequences for the later relationship between post-Holocaust France and its Jewish citizens, given in the short term the waning of more far-reaching social change arising from a combination of socialist idealism, Communist Party credibility, and liberal Catholic political renaissance, and in the longer term such dismaying moments relative to the Six-Day War as de Gaulle’s casual depiction of the Jewish people as self-assured and domineering (echoed in former ambassador René Massigli’s later repetition of the old insidious claim that French Jews retained double loyalties). In the meantime, however, the immediate tasks of an uncertain interregnum caused by de Gaulle’s resignation period at the beginning of 1946, the short-lived nature of simple denunciation, the failed attempt to develop a Resistance Party, the need to involve or contain the Communist Party, and the electorate’s apathetic response to a new constitution and national elections all promoted uneasy tripartist cohabitation that swiftly reconstituted politics along recognizable lines and indeed quickly created conditions favorable to the return of right-wing parties whose rhetoric offered apology for the Vichy period. All of these factors were therefore to encourage the continuing emergence of independent Jewish agencies, both at this point and in ensuing decades, in the absence of any real national determination to address specifically Jewish claims.
Framing Presence: From “Silence” to Plurality

The initial postwar period in France therefore gives us simultaneously a lack of official specification of the treatments of Jews and a related growth in Jewish agency and identity. This situation qualifies a still vaguely accepted view that the 1950s and 1960s in France, as well as elsewhere, were a period of silence amounting to a generalized repression of events that had traumatized survivors, revealed suspicion and hatred in implicated societies, and even exposed inherently repressive tendencies in technologized cultures. Such an interpretation, problematically reviewed by Bruno Bettelheim as a kind of autism, became popularly ingrained as a psychologization of the period by Rousso’s *Vichy Syndrome*, first published in 1987, which now presented the postwar decade in antipositivist terms as one of an “unfinished mourning” destined to return in the 1970s as an obsessive screen memory against which contemporary anxieties were being projected. This view of a haunting “past that will not pass” seemed to be endorsed by both surviving intellectuals and a postmemory generation of artists. The former mostly recalled a landscape in which nothing was said or heard, while the latter seemed hypnotized by the moral ambiguities of the period. These kinds of fixations coexisted with the multivolume work (produced between 1984 and 1992) of Pierre Nora, which relocated French collective consciousness in monumental “realms of memory.” One relevant thought here is that these relocations could absorb specifically Jewish experience within an undisrupted and even consolidated concept of republican singularity and its martyrlogy. A case in point here is the Paris World Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr. In design and symbolism, this memorial clearly harmonizes with traditional universal and national war monuments, even to the extent of depicting only foreign camp names. It was inaugurated in 1956, at a ceremony opened by André Le Troquer (then president of the National Assembly), attended by military representatives, and accompanied by a rendition of “The Marseillaise,” thus giving a controlling and exculpating role to the nation (in the guise of the Vichy state) which had itself sanctioned the martyrdom. The original memorial, incidentally, now finds itself within the premises of the Mémorial de la Shoah, which was itself inaugurated on January 25, 2005, by the then president, Jacques
Chirac. On this occasion, Chirac’s discourse offered a psychological vision of the “perversion” of anti-Semitism and the “criminal madness” that had been “seconded” by the French state. This vision was then immediately followed by an expression of French vigilance, responsibility, and duty. His speech obviously recalled and reinforced the one he had famously given in 1995 to mark the fifty-third anniversary of the Vel’ d’Hiv roundup, where he had spoken notably of a nation’s collective blame. In parallel to the absorption of the memorial here, we can also note how neither Alain Resnais’s 1955 film *Nuit et brouillard* nor the contemporary collection of survivor accounts by Henri Michel and Olga Wormser-Migot made reference to the specificity of Jewish victims, and instead employed in largely the same way the homogenizing tones and thematics of tragedy.25

Such productions and commemorations could indeed all seem to associate a generalized tragic tenor with a decade locked in individual or national mutism.26 Yet the analyses supplied by this book point powerfully instead to a very different dynamic. For they emphasize how, throughout the decade in question, the struggle to achieve political and moral recognition for the abundance of testimony, evidence, and analysis is pursued at every level of communal and institutional engagement. This more positive perspective is also arguably endorsed by the emergence of a subsequent key generation of activists and historians. These include the self-described “memory militant” Serge Klarsfeld, who in 1979 founded the Association des fils et filles des déportés juifs de France (Association of the Sons and Daughters of Jews Deported from France) to defend and prosecute on behalf of deportees, who helped to bring Klaus Barbie, Maurice Papon, and others to justice, and whose massive book and database, the *Mémorial de la déportation des Juifs de France*, documenting the core statistics of some 76,000 Jews deported from France, has now itself the status of a national memorialization.27 They also include the work of postwar historians such as Annette Wieviorka, whose valorization of testimony, from the moment of her doctoral dissertation on deportation and genocide, equally insists on a rebalancing of the competing claims of memory and national history.28 With the detailed study of the cultural production of “silence” carried out by Hasia Diner in relation to postwar American Jewry in mind, we also note the
wealth of other forms of communication during the 1950s in France, including the rapid resurgence of a Jewish press both in French and in Yiddish, newsletters such as *Vendredi Soir* produced by the Consistory, Zionist publications such as the revitalized *La Terre retrouvée*, and the radio program Écoute Israël. In the light of these, and the overwhelming drive and variety of responses detailed by our chapters, we therefore conclude that we should read the period 1945–55 in France not merely as the morose and guilty scene of an unattended crime, but more productively as a deeply foundational process that entails a profoundly transformed status for Jews in France during the twentieth century.

This means that the postwar years in France are not just the post mortem of a relationship that has been destroyed, but that they are equally the establishment of a new relational identity. This identity would shortly after become further transformed by the effects of decolonization, the Cold War, the Six-Day War, and contemporary world politics. The French Empire had already been undermined by World War II and the hopeless conflict in Indochina, yet was still intractably adhered to by almost every major political party, with military expenditure actually increasing from a quarter to a third of the French budget in the period 1952–55. The eventual independence from France of North African countries (Tunisia in 1952–56, Morocco in 1956, Algeria in 1962), combined with the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and the Suez campaign in 1956, also had fundamental and ultimately positive consequences for the relationship between Jews and France, given not least the mass immigration to France from the Maghreb of over 145,000 Jews. In addition to the social and cultural changes that this naturally entailed for a Jewish presence in France, the firm support for Israel from North African Jews and the clear equation made between the Holocaust and fascism by a younger generation of left-wing Jewish intellectuals also injected a further intellectual and political activism into French Jewish identities. The period beyond the postwar decade is therefore one in which a Jewish French presence moves decisively from the traditional homogeneity and invisibility of Franco-Judaism to a greater pluralism and diverging involvement. This evolution has not been slowed or diverted since, even when upsurges of anti-Semitic violence regenerate doubts about integration. This book therefore attests not only to an important moment in the historical relationship between France and
Jews, but also to the future of this relationship. For the efforts of organizations and activists in the first postwar decade both restored a community and its infrastructure and laid the groundwork for a renewed relationship between France and the Jews that continues to the present day.

NOTES

1. For discussion of both the formation of this French model and the challenges it has undergone, see Pierre Birnbaum, Jewish Destinies: Citizenship, State, and Community in Modern France (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

2. For an energetic commentary on this period, see David Pryce-Jones, Betrayal: France, the Arabs, and the Jews (New York: Encounter, 2008).

3. For accounts of more recent moments of tension and discord, see, for example, Henry H. Weinberg, The Myth of the Jew in France, 1967–82 (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1989). More recently again, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Israel Ministry of Immigration and Absorption reported in 2013 a spike in French aliyah rates, attributing this effect both to economic recession and to anti-Semitic outrages such as the killing of schoolchildren and a rabbi in Toulouse by a French Algerian lone terrorist.


6. For details of these changes in patronymic, see Nicole Lapierre, Changer de nom (Paris: Stock, 1995).


15. See, for example, Neher’s 1979 post-aliyah *They Made Their Souls Anew* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), which describes the Jew as riven and existential, but ends by extolling a “dynamic of the way” (241).


19. See, for example, de Gaulle’s memo on the subject of summary executions taking place in prisons, on December 30, 1944, in de Gaulle, *War Memoirs*, 144.

20. Speech made by General de Gaulle to the Consultative Assembly, November 9, 1944, in ibid., 66.


23. See, for example, the account of Simone Veil recorded by Annette Wieviorka as “Une difficile réflexion,” *Pardès* 16 (1992), or that of the Communist deportee Pierre Daix in *Bréviaire pour Mauthausen* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005). I am clearly referring to the work of Georges Perec, and especially *W ou le souvenir d’enfance*, which Susan Suleiman isolates; but also to that of Patrick Modiano, including *Dora Bruder* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).


30. For comments on one atrocity in 1980, when the synagogue in the rue Copernic was bombed, see Shmuel Trigano, La République et les juifs après Copernic (Paris: Les Presses d’aujourd’hui, 1982). Most recently, the controversy surrounding the anti-Semitic references embedded in the performances, pronouncements, and associations of the “comedian” Dieudonné has exposed continuing tensions within French society regarding competing testimonies of memory and identity, and in the process has also problematized application of the 1990 Gayssot law, whose first article states that “any discrimination founded on membership or non-membership of an ethnic group, a nation, a race or a religion is prohibited.”