Forty Years of Suffering[1]

Bruno Chaouat

For Jeffrey Mehlman, as a humble tribute to his chiastic imagination.

— And the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the Lord was consumed.

Numbers 32:13

ALAIN FINKIELKRAUT GREETED the third millennium with a jaded rendition of Holocaust hypermnesia:[2] "La Shoah est omniprésente. Ses morts ne connaissent jamais le repos. Constamment sur la brèche, sollicités en permanence, sans cesse au travail, ils n'ont pas une minute à eux."[3] Busy indeed, the dead, ceaselessly solicited to serve political ends. Handy too, the dead, when it comes to vilifying the enemy of the day. Is there not a Hitler in each unpopular leader? In each victim, is there not a Jew hiding? No footage, not a film documenting genocides or unpopular wars that does not make at least passing reference to the Holocaust. A mass grave? Dachau. A pile of Cambodian skulls? Auschwitz. Guantanamo Bay? Worse than Auschwitz.[4] The tsunami? "A natural Holocaust." Israel? The new Third Reich. The Palestinians? Today's Jews.[5] The 1948 *Naqba*? The Palestinian *Shoah*. Rwanda? The African Holocaust. Saddam Hussein? Hitler redivivus.

The Holocaust, it seems, has become the backdrop on which human grief and political violence are framed, broadcast in real time. Barbie Zelizer has documented the obsessive Holocaust reference in images of mass killings and war.[6] How can one account for the use of Holocaust imagery to represent current atrocities and injustice? First, if every mass murder resembles the Holocaust, perhaps it is because mass murders hopelessly resemble one another. A corpse is a corpse is a corpse. Cruelty does not innovate. A second hypothesis: the Holocaust reference, because the Holocaust was an extreme atrocity, is expected to mobilize public awareness. Yet, paradoxically, this call for action paralyzes to the extent that seeing "*a* Holocaust"[7] occurring here and now makes one feel at best powerless, at worse blasé. When atrocities are staged on TV and in the news on a daily basis, "Never again!" becomes "Ever again." If each war, each genocide is *a* Holocaust, then *the* Holocaust simply keeps re-happening all over again, everywhere, and there is nothing we can do or want to do about it. The *devoir de mémoire*, from a new, Kantian categorical imperative once formulated by Adorno ("Think and act in such a way

that Auschwitz will not repeat itself"[8]), has become a moot prescription. Europe and more broadly the West arguably suffer from Holocaust hyperaesthesia. This hyperaesthesia, Finkielkraut contends, borders on collective amnesia—a narcotization of experience.[9]

Hypersensitivity to the Holocaust not only distracts from current suffering, it also risks turning the Holocaust against its victims. Since the outbreak of the second *intifada* and attacks against French Jews by French Muslims identifying with the Palestinian struggle, Holocaust commemoration has failed to provide a political, intellectual or moral ground from which to denounce new expressions of anti-Semitism poorly masqueraded as radical anti-Zionism or as critique of Israeli policy.[10]

If, as Finkielkraut has suggested,[11] World War II split Europe's consciousness among victim, victor, and perpetrator, decolonization aggravated this identity crisis by highlighting Europe's guilt in colonial oppression. Jeffrey Mehlman has noted Europe's reluctance to work through its colonial and anti-Semitic past. Such reluctance, expressed by the reduction of ethics to dogma, may explain the French commentariat's paralysis during the backlash of the Middle East conflict on the French Jewish community:

> Europe having opted to dissolve the shame of its Holocaust in the guilt of its colonialism, appears to have now opted to subject the guilt of its colonialism to the salutary acids of its anti-racist anti-colonialism. It is a process that is no less flawed by its questionable assimilation of Zionism to a form of colonialism than by the egalitarian blind spots of its dogmatic anti-colonialism.[12]

Although the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust remained unacknowledged for nearly twenty years, once it was acknowledged the claim of "uniqueness" rendered it a coveted symbolic commodity. Who does not want his suffering to be acknowledged as unique? If the Holocaust is "uniquely unique," more unique than unique, then Jewish suffering will become the most enviable moral commodity.[13] Paradoxically, and despite the fact that it originates in a symposium of Jewish scholars, the uniqueness argument, meant to highlight the specificity of Jewish suffering, seems to have fostered a de-judaization of the Holocaust, to the extent that every victimized group wants its suffering to be recognized as unique, i.e., as *a* Holocaust.[14] To reclaim the absolute singularity of the Holocaust risks at the same time universalizing it and stripping it of its historical and moral significance not only for the Jews but for all humankind.

In his iconoclastic and exhilarating book, *La Concurrence des victimes*, Jean-Michel Chaumont has thoroughly analyzed what Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer branded "Holocaust envy."[15] If Jews were long portrayed by traditional anti-Semitism as capitalists and usurers who dispossessed Gentiles, they are

now denounced as taking advantage from the moral and material capital that befell them after the war. How can one not be unimpeachable if one has gone through such extreme pain? How can one not strive to be a "Jew" in order to share the moral benefit associated with the Holocaust? If no one in his right mind would invest in the real suffering occasioned by the Holocaust, all strive for the symbolic benefit attached to it.

Until the 1960s, there was nothing enviable in Jewish suffering. Being Jewish in France in the immediate aftermath of the war remained shameful. "Racial" deportees were not warmly welcomed when they returned to France, let alone to other countries such as Poland. They were not acknowledged as "racial" deportees. The very reason for their deportation was denied, suppressed or downplayed by a French public opinion that had yet to come to terms with the racial laws ("Statuts des Juifs") that the Vichy regime had willfully promulgated and implemented, often with the help of zealous French citizens. Jewish survivors were construed as collateral victims of a war, rather than seen for what they were, namely, targeted victims of European anti-Semitism. Deported as Jews, they were in the best case converted upon their return into political prisoners—members of the French Resistance.[16] After their Jewish identity had been made an object of shame by Vichy France and Nazi Germany, it was altogether immolated on the altar of a post-War politics of reconciliation. Jews were a problem before the war. They remained a problem after the war. Their return, rather than provoking recognition, plunged them again into an existential vacuum. Yesterday deprived of their basic humanity, they could not today claim to have been dehumanized. Jewish survivors confronted a public opinion that did not want to hear from an experience furthered in France by what was at best indifference and at worst outright participation. There was no talk of "genocide" or "extermination." Instead, the euphemized and somewhat vague phrases of "Nazi barbarity" and "deportations" were used.

These last fifteen years, testimony studies and trauma theory have emphasized the structural inability to narrate extreme suffering.[17] Survivors' silence has been attributed to the failure of language to convey a traumatic experience. Simone Veil, a "racial" deportee, has quite a different explanation for this silence. For her, the survivors' silence is hardly structural—it is political. It stems not from the speaker's inability to translate her experience into words, but from the interlocutors' refusal to listen. Racial deportees did not talk because they found no ear to listen to what they had to say. And they found no ear because what they had to say could not fail to trigger guilt, shame and embarrassment among their interlocutors. Shamed by the survivors' testi-

monies, interlocutors silenced them and perpetuated the shaming of the victims by their perpetrators:

> J'ai l'impression d'avoir été comme un enfant à qui, chaque fois qu'il a quelque chose d'important à dire, ou qu'il va révéler ce qui le préoccupe, les parents, quelque peu gênés, coupent la parole, par un geste, par un mot, tellement inadapté, tellement absurde, que le fil de sa pensée est coupé. C'est pourquoi il aurait été dérisoire de parler alors qu'on avait si peu envie de nous entendre, et que nous aurions été si mal compris. J'ai vécu cela comme une humiliation permanente.[18]

Infantilized and shamed at their return, "racial" deportees internalized the deafness of their compatriots and relatives and convinced themselves that they had nothing to say, or that what they had been through was so extreme[19] that it could not be articulated, narrated, transmitted.[20] As Chaumont notes, Simone Veil uses the same expression, "humiliation permanente," to characterize the refusal to listen and the treatment of the victims by their sadistic tormentors. While one should not dismiss the clinical and theoretical findings on individual and collective trauma, it is worth warning against the exclusive recourse to trauma theory to read the deportees' silence. Likewise, one should be careful not to read this silence as some mysterious expression of a radical, almost metaphysical incommunicability.[21] Exclusive emphasis on the survivor's muteness risks overshadowing the political and ethical issues in post-War France.

Here is how Annette Wieviorka sums up the operation that transformed the world's deafness into the survivors' muteness: "Souvent, nous lisons ou entendons dire: les déportés n'ont ni pu, ni voulu parler. Idée reçue, transfert de la surdité du monde sur un prétendu mutisme."[22] To attend to a dialectical relation between "*indicible*" and "*inaudible*" has become an urgent task. Georges Didi-Huberman's recent attempt at reading dialectically four Auschwitz photographs instead of perpetuating the dogma of the "unimaginable" should inspire and transform Holocaust and testimony studies.[23]

If in the years following the war Jewish suffering was shameful, the 1960s saw the emergence of a politics of victmhood that will at once reclaim the specificity of Jewish suffering and de-judaize the Holocaust. Indeed, for Jews and non-Jews alike, the name "Jew" will soon become a metonymy for "victim." After the *Yiddishkeit* had been wiped out, Jewish identity was reduced to pure negativity. Post-World War II Jews will be perceived and will perceive themselves as the heirs of the most barbaric event in modern history. What does being Jewish mean for those born in Europe after the War? Jewish identity, Alain Finkielkraut contends, has become purely histrionic and hopelessly hollow. The post-War French Jew, Finkielkraut's young persona, suffers

from an inflated ego. He is a victim by proxy, a phony survivor. His suffering is a pose. He is the Don Juan of pain:

> En dépit de mes efforts, je ne portais pas le deuil de ma famille exterminée, mais j'en portais l'étendard: que je relate, à mon tour, les épisodes familiaux de la solution finale, et mon interlocuteur, saisi d'un mélange de stupéfaction, de honte et de respect, voyait en moi autre chose que moi-même: le visage des suppliciés. Je médusais mon public. D'autres avaient souffert, et moi parce que j'étais leur descendant, j'en recueillais tout le bénéfice moral.[24]

Finkielkraut's Jew—himself as a young man, a metonymy of his generation—is not a mourner. Or, to put it differently, mourning for him is playful, literally a *Trauerspiel*, a comedy of loss, a parody of suffering. Finkielkraut's persona bears the external signs of suffering without its experience and stigma.

Le Juif imaginaire reads like *Madame Bovary*. The "ostentation du rien" that characterizes his generation operates not only at the level of the *énoncé* but also throughout the inflated, ostentatious style of this speculative memoir. Finkielkraut sketches the portrait of a post-War Jew as a revolutionary bereft of a revolution: "Il ne se passait rien, et ce rien qui nous arrivait nous l'habillions des oripeaux révolutionnaires… Que d'identités nous avons successivement revêtues!" (27). Finkielkraut stages a Jew who longs for an event to happen, and who will find his Rodolphe or Léon in the aborted revolution of May, itself a pale copy of the century's revolutions:

> L'actualité, nous l'avons regardée comme Mme Bovary lisait ses bluettes: dans la perte ravie de nous-mêmes. Nous étions les midinettes du politique. Et comme Emma, nous nous sommes conduits en rêveurs obstinés qui refusent le jour … pour accéder au réel ou à ce qui nous était désigné sous ce nom, nous n'avons pas su trouver d'autre solution que d'évoluer dans l'imaginaire. (33)

If for the radical left, revolution—legible in the news as the daily unfolding of History[25]—constitutes the Real, in good Lacanian epistemology, it will be grasped (and lost) through the Imaginary, with the TV screen as mirror. Post-War Jews, having missed the arch-Real that persecutions and the Holocaust were for the generation of their parents, will act it out through an empty and interchangeable identification with the martyrs of modern history.

Finkielkraut, with poignant and iconoclastic self-derision, understood that post-War French Jewish identity was emptied out by the hysterical repetition of a traumatic, all too real yet missed event. He understood that he was both hopelessly and providentially born too late. And French thought began to elaborate its Jewish envy by reducing the Jew to extreme experience in the aftermath of the "révolution-fiction."[26]

By the late 1960s, having been a victim has not only become avowable, it is somehow desirable. Then came May '68, with its famous slogan protesting Daniel Cohn-Bendit's extradition: "Nous sommes tous des Juifs allemands." The dead of Auschwitz were now harnessed to the cause of an aborted revolution. Three years earlier, Emmanuel Levinas had denounced the entry of Auschwitz into the society of the spectacle, and foreseen Holocaust denial on the left: "Déjà un auteur à succès ramène le génocide des camps aux problèmes que pose la condition ouvrière dans les usines Renault."[27] From the salutary if belated realization that Jews were human beings was inferred the reverse proposition: that all human beings were Jews, or at least that oppressed humanity in general and the proletariat in particular—class struggle *oblige*—was Jewish. This de-judaization of the Holocaust and of the Jews through the judaization of the oppressed would trigger consequences that we have yet fully to weigh.

In the 1970s and 80s, when the once genuinely dissident and provocative rhetoric of May had pervaded mainstream politics and the media, a politics of victimhood started to emerge. It culminated in 2004, with the creation of a special office ("secrétariat d'Etat") devoted to victims' rights.[28] Following Chaumont's analysis, I suggest that by the late 1960s the cult of the hero and resister was superseded by a cult of the victim, survivor and witness. Paradoxically, the authentic hero of the 1960s is one who proudly proclaims that he was not a heroic resistant. Not unlike narratives of sainthood and martyrdom, glory came out of debasement, fame rose from infamy. Passivity and acceptance were progressively gaining their letters of nobility. Dehumanization was triumphantly entering the republic of letters: "la honte d'être victime est retournée contre le monde qui l'inflige, et la tare de jadis est activement transformée en un emblème fièrement arboré."[29] Chaumont attributes this revolution mainly to Elie Wiesel's intellectual and moral impact in the U.S. and Europe. The reversal from shame to fame is co-extensive with the debate on the uniqueness of the Holocaust. At this juncture, an intriguing mutation can be observed: while heroism and resistance were valued and humiliation suppressed before 1967, after 1967 shame became heroic. The humiliation attached to dehumanization was reversed into the glory of having suffered like no one else in human history.

Interestingly enough, this reversal occurs during the Six-Day War. Yet the Six-Day War marks a concomitant reversal: from victims, Jews have become victors. At the moment when the past victimhood is finally reversed into glory, the Jews, through Israel's victory, will be perceived as perpetrators. Indeed, while victimhood becomes a title of glory, military victory becomes

in turn shameful and suspicious. After 1967, Jews who had only begun to constitute the memory of the Holocaust were at once glorified for yesterday's humiliation and blamed for today's victory. It is five short years after the independence of Algeria, in a context of postcolonial guilt into which Mehlman suggests that Holocaust shame was dissolving. French Jews are torn between identification with yesterday's European victims and today's Israeli victors, between the Holocaust and Masada, Auschwitz and the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto. Yesterday's alleged Jewish non-resistance is vindicated by today's Israeli bellicosity.

The reversal will take time to permeate a French Jewish consciousness haunted by the Holocaust. The eve of the Six-Day War will be lived as a traumatic repetition of the past. For such prominent Jewish intellectuals as Raymond Aron and Emmanuel Levinas, De Gaulle's anti-Israeli policy, to which he added an offensive declaration that the Jews are a "dominating and self-assured people" (an obvious projection on the Jews of De Gaulle's own arrogant and untranslatable "certaine idée de la France"), uncannily echoes Pétain's forsaking of the Jews. Israel is perceived by the French Jewish community as the Jew among nations, doomed to undergo what a dumbfounded Aron branded "*statocide*": "De Gaulle has deliberately and willfully opened a new era in Jewish history and perhaps a new age of anti-Semitism."[30]

Thus, as France struggles to conjure away the ghosts of its anti-Semitic past and its colonial guilt, as the Jews' image is changing dramatically in French consciousness, both Jewish and non-Jewish,[31] French thought elaborates the motif of "passivity" and heralds the end of the hero's glorious end. This motif was arguably prompted by Maurice Blanchot's remarks on Holocaust testimonies. A culture of passivity would find uncanny resonances in the most sophisticated theories characterized by a synthesis of onto-phenomenology and mysticism—a post-structuralist new age of sorts.[32] These theories will promote patience over agency, passivity over activity, enduring over reacting, letting go over fighting back. In all these motifs, one can hear echoes of Meister Eckhart's *Gelazenheit*, an exercise in detachment that will translate in Jean-François Lyotard's work as "passibility" or affectability, itself a borderline concept between ethics and aesthetics. But if for Lyotard the mystical motif of *Gelazenheit*, which reaches French thought via Heidegger, translates as "passibility," for Derrida, Eckhart's *Gelazenheit* is read, through Angelus Silesius, as *impassibility*, i.e., as the condition of possibility of difference, not unlike the matrix in Plato's *Timaeus*: "…sereine impassibilité …insensibilité suraiguë… capable de faire vibrer à tout, précisément à cause de ce fond d'indifférence qui expose à n'importe quelle différence."[33]

One year after May '68, Maurice Blanchot publishes his monumental anti-book, *L'Entretien infini*. By the end of the book—also a book on the end of the book and on the never-ending end of philosophy—in a review of Serge Doubrovsky's book on Corneille's dialectic,[34] Blanchot proclaims the end of the hero. This end of the hero he pairs with a reflection on the phenomenology of death meant to supersede the thought of light and Being and to challenge, twenty years after Levinas's *Le Temps et l'autre*, Heidegger's heroic and sanitized analysis of death:

> la mort n'est pas quelque chose de propre, de net, de valeureux, elle n'est pas le tranchant de la mort, la pure activité de l'Acte-maître: elle est passivité, obscurité, l'infini de la souffrance donnée ou reçue, l'abject Malheur, l'extinction sans éclat.[35]

After Auschwitz, death, *pace* Roland Barthes, will be flat or will be nothing at all.[36] Yet flat death does not mean instantaneous death. It merely means a-dialectical, a reversal of Christian and Hegelian work of the negative. Flat as opposed to *relevée*, as opposed to sublated. *Mort sans relief,* as it were. *Désoeuvrement* has replaced work. The work of death has reversed into the death of work. In fact, with Blanchot death is no longer instantaneous but progressive. Curiously enough, the "tranchant de la mort" synecdoche hints at the Reign of Terror by evoking the knife blade of the guillotine, precisely the historic moment when, for Hegel, death loses its dialectical significance and *éclat*. But here, paradoxically, the absence of *"tranchant"* flattens death, makes it a-dialectical.[37]

Endowing Levinas' post-War critique of Heidegger's analysis of death as self-appropriation and authenticity with Beckettian and Kafkaesque inflections, Blanchot sees death as an interminable process rather than the term of life.[38] Yet where Levinas' critique of self-appropriation through death was meant to open the subject to the future and to the other,[39] Blanchot's critique of the ontology of death from Hegel to Heidegger seems wedged in an interminable, slimy and nightmarish present, undoubtedly more reminiscent of Beckett than of Levinas. Thus, if for Levinas the finitude of *Dasein*, as the "impossibility of the possibility," carries the promise of the ethical relation with the other, death for Blanchot arguably pertains to *Trauerspiel*.[40]

Blanchot's "disaster," a direct reference at times to the historic event of the Holocaust, at times to writing and literary experience, calls for a re-reading of all the literary deaths of the past. Death will henceforth be Kafkaesque, it will be a liquidation, an abjection, an infamy. Likewise, all past deaths will always have heralded "Auschwitz," the "death of death": "Ce n'est plus une mort, c'est la liquidation. 'Comme un chien', dira plus tard le 'héros' de Kafka"

(*L'Entretien infini* 551). Such a death echoes Adorno's 1966 characterization of Auschwitz as a death that is worse than death and the entry into dying, death as process instead of "*tranchant*," and resonates with Rilke's early depiction of anonymous death in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*.

1969 may be the year that marks the triumphant entry of "useless suffering"[41] on the stage of French thought, a stage previously dominated by action, resistance, revolution and engagement. It is also in 1969 that Blanchot sketches an ontology of Jewishness which he significantly inserts in a section of *L'Entretien infini* devoted to the extreme experience, "*expérience-limite*." Curiously, this ontology of Jewishness occurs after a commentary on Lucien Goldmann's Marxist reading of Pascal and a mystically inspired discussion of Simone Weil. Blanchot's reading of Jewishness, duly entitled "Être juif," is inflected by negative theology and the Christian mystic experience of metaphysical exile and ecstasy. Jewish historical persecutions are subsumed under an existential affliction inherent in Jewishness—a fateful dereliction reminiscent both of Pascal's lapsarian narrative and of Heidegger's *Geworfenheit,* or abandonment of *Dasein*: "Le Juif est malaise et malheur." If one turns to Blanchot's reflections on Simone Weil, one finds a phenomenology of suffering and affliction that will be transferred onto the "Jews" via the experience of the concentration camps and the reading of Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine*:

> Le Malheur . . . a la même essence que la souffrance physique . . . lorsqu'elle est telle qu'on ne peut ni la souffrir ni cesser de la souffrir, arrêtant donc le temps, faisant du temps un présent sans avenir et cependant impossible comme présent… le malheur nous fait perdre le temps, nous fait perdre le monde. (*L'Entretien infini* 174-75)

Suffering is ontologically analogous to "malheur," and like Freud's unconscious, it is timeless. Jews are "malaise et malheur," something like the unconscious of the West. They will embody the supreme stage of suffering and of passivity, withdrawal from the world, absolute separation. Passivity and a metaphysical inclination towards suffering will become a prominent feature of the postmodern elaboration of Jewishness.

This ontologization of Jewish passivity, overdetermined by the French memorialization of the Holocaust, required downplaying two sets of historical conditions: the material conditions of detention that were not conducive to fighting back, and Jewish Resistance.[42] Twenty years later, in *Heidegger and "the jews"*, Lyotard will compare Elie Wiesel's *Night* with Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine* in order to dismiss the latter's experience as pertaining to the ideology of heroism and agency, to the "grand récit" of Resistance and of Freudian resistance:

Mais Antelme résiste, c'est un résistant. Toute résistance est ambiguë, comme son nom l'indique. Résistance politique, mais résistance au sens freudien. Formation de compromis. Apprendre à négocier avec la terreur nazie, à la manœuvrer, même si c'est très peu. Essayer de la comprendre pour la déjouer. Jouer sa vie, pour ça. Toucher les limites qui sont celles de l'espèce humaine, pour ça. C'est la guerre. La déportation est une partie de la guerre. Antelme sauve l'honneur.[43]

Lyotard's argument feeds on the myth of Jewish non-resistance in order to celebrate the Jews as victims and privileged witnesses to a metaphysics or metapsychology of passivity. Martin Crowley has sharply criticized Lyotard both for endorsing the myth of Jewish non-resistance and for his suggestion that there is any attempt at negotiating or compromising with the SS in Antelme's account.[44] Yet Crowley does so in order to highlight what he identifies as Antelme's "residual" resistance. For Crowley, Antelme's testimony is not ontologically removed from Wiesel's, at least as far as passivity is concerned. Crowley argues against Lyotard's reading of Antelme less for its philo-Semitic bias (*Jews are sublime because they do not resist*) than because Lyotard overlooks Antelme's own passivity or symbolic "Jewishness." To emphasize the passivity at work in Antelme's testimony is a tempting move determined by Blanchot's early reading of Antelme in *L'Entretien infini*, and later on by Marguerite Duras' fictional diary *La Douleur*.[45] Crowley's point consists less in challenging Lyotard's "sublime" reading of Wiesel and of Jewish experience of the Holocaust—although Crowley must be commended for doing it—than in "judaizing" Antelme's testimony through a dialectical and powerful elaboration of resistance and abjection.

Elie Wiesel's *Night*, to be sure, tells the tale of a Jewish youngster who did not resist. Indeed, the young boy could not resist for circumstantial reasons: too young, the conditions for the Jews in Auschwitz hinder resistance, Auschwitz is not Dachau, a death camp is not a labor camp, the young boy comes from an orthodox, pacifist background, etc. Yet, for Lyotard, Wiesel's non-resistance exemplifies the inherently passive feature of Jewish experience and existence. Lyotard's "jews," perhaps closer to Christian mystics, are turned toward God—or trauma, or the unconscious affect, or Nazi terror—without resisting.

To be fair, Lyotard's reading is prompted by Wiesel's own metaphysical and mystic response to the Holocaust. To the extent that they do not resist, Jews—or "the jews"—are, for French thought, truly irresistible. From having been dehumanized by their experience and infantilized upon their return, they have come to incarnate ontological infancy and the inhuman within man, a childhood stubbornly resisting Christian or modern European emancipation.[46] While Lyotard must be commended for having distinguished between xeno-

phobia and anti-Semitism, a distinction perhaps more urgent today than ever,[47] his anti-anti-Semitic enthusiasm and his metaphysical and metapsychological reading of anti-Semitism have unfortunately led him to reproduce anti-Semitic *topoi*. Thus he denies that the Jews are a people,[48] a disconcerting stereotype that presupposes the knowledge of what a people *is*.[49] Likewise, as Elisabeth Bellamy has shown in the case of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe[50], Lyotard takes over the Hegelian argument that Jews are anti-aesthetic, anti-tragic, anti-heroic: "Les 'juifs' ne sont pas tragiques. Ce ne sont pas des héros" (*Heidegger et "les juifs"* 56). Lyotard's philo-Semitism, or, as Mehlman would put it, his anti-anti-Semitism, merely reverses the *topoi* of anti-Semitism.

If French philo-Semites are right in construing anti-Semitism as structural, if the European unconscious is structured by its abjection of the Jews, it is likely that Europe will remain anti-Semitic. An updated version of the structural argument—itself an updated version of Pinsker's and Herzl's "eternal anti-Semitism" thesis, minus the political solution—can be found in Jean-Claude Milner's *Les Penchants criminels de l'Europe démocratique*.[51] Milner attempts to account for the new expressions of anti-Semitism in France and in Europe since the second *intifada* and to read Europe's anti-Israeli policy as a continuation of this structural, metapsychological anti-Semitism: "It is this 'structural' hatred of Europe for the Jews that is Milner's theme, which he encapsulates, rather than argues, in terms of the Jew being what the Lacanians call 'the *objet a* of the West.'"[52]

Let us submit that Milner's endeavor is post-Zionist. By "post-Zionist" I do not have in mind the immanent and unforgiving critique of Zionism launched by Israeli historians and intellectuals since the 1980s, often caricatured or stigmatized as "postmodernists," but rather a post-structuralist Zionism of sorts. Not surprisingly, the book ends on the comminatory advice to European Jews to leave Europe. This advice to desert Europe and find refuge, in Israel or North America one would guess, launched out of an immoderate love for the Jews, uncannily echoes the sensible warnings of early 20th-century Zionism on the eve of the most murderous wave of anti-Semitism in history. Milner's argument reads like a Lacanian version of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's call to French Jews in July of 2004 to immigrate, a call that unsurprisingly stirred up official French indignation.[53] With works such as Milner's and Eric Marty's *Bref séjour à Jerusalem*,[54] French thought, it so appears, has entered the age of post-philo-Semitism.

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Notes

1. This essay constitutes a sketch of the opening section of my book, *Jewish Envy: The Culture of Victimhood in France.*
2. The politics of memory, amnesia and hypermnesia in post-Holocaust France has been thoroughly documented and analyzed in Joan Wolf's *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2004). As for the debate on the adequate name for the destruction of the Jews, it is of utmost importance, granted that, as Albert Camus once put it, "Mal nommer les choses, c'est ajouter au malheur du monde." To be sure, each name is overdetermined, connoted, loaded. If the "final solution" is a German design, using a Hebrew name such as "Shoah" risks inscribing it in Jewish history and theodicy, and poses serious ethical and historical issues. Moreover, the word "Shoah" has acquired a Parisian cachet. Snobbery has devalued the initial power and the seal of authenticity once carried by the Hebrew word. I will thus, for lack of a better word, stick to the old-fashioned "Holocaust" which, although inappropriate, has the merit of being understood in the US and in Europe. On this debate, see John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications* (New York: Paragon House, 1989). See also the polemic that broke out in February of 2005 between Henri Meschonnic and Claude Lanzmann, "Pour en finir avec le mot 'Shoah,'" Henri Meschonnic, *Le Monde* (2/19/05), and "Ce mot de 'Shoah,'" Claude Lanzmann, *Le Monde* (2/25/05).
3. Alain Finkielkraut, *Une voix vient de l'autre rive* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 89.
4. See the opening pages of Giorgio Agamben's *État d'exception* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).
5. On the Nazification of Israel and the Judaization of the Palestinians, see Sami Nair, Edgar Morin and Danièle Sallenave, "Israel-Palestine: le cancer" in *Le Monde,* (6/3/2002).
6. See Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998). See particularly the last section of the book that focuses on the proliferation of the Holocaust reference in the media in the 1990s.
7. The use of the indefinite article is highlighted by Zelizer, who mentions a *New York Times* article, "Does the World Still Recognize a Holocaust?" (4/25/1993). The article laments world indifference to the executions of Muslims by Serbs.
8. T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, E.B. Ashton, trans. (New York: Seabury Press, 1973; 1966 for the German edition).
9. See Zelizer 212. For Zelizer, the abuse of the Holocaust reference risks distracting public opinion from current atrocities. See also Alain Finkielkraut, *La Mémoire vaine*: *du crime contre l'humanité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989) which analyzes the hijacking of the memory of the Holocaust to ideological ends on the extreme left on the occasion of the Barbie trial.
10. Dire repercussions of the Middle East conflict on the French Jewish community were documented in several books and official documents. See, for data, the following website of the Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme (http://www.commission-droits-homme.fr). See also the "Chantier sur la lutte contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme (rapport présenté par Jean-Christophe Rufin, écrivain, médecin et responsable de nombreuses associations d'aide humanitaire, remis à Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur, de la Sécurité Intérieure et des Libertés Locales le 19 octobre 2004 suite à une lettre de mission en date du 29 juin 2004." (This document is available on the website of the French Ministry of the Interior.) Finally, see Pierre-André Taguieff, *La Nouvelle Judéophobie* (Paris: Fayard, 2002). For a pointed and witty intellectual and cultural history of this allegedly "new anti-Semitism," see Jeffrey Mehlman, "Sad News: l'antisémitisme nouveau est arrivé," *Contemporary French Civilization*, 27 (Summer-Fall 2003): 277-96.
11. In Alain Finkielkraut, *Au nom de l'autre: Réflexions sur l'antisémitisme qui vient* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).
12. Jeffrey Mehlman, "A New Judeocentrism?" Lecture delivered at the University of Minnesota, October 28, 2004, as part of the Department of French and Italian lecture series "The French Middle East: Fallout From the Arab-Israeli Conflict in France" (proceedings forthcoming). I thank Jeffrey Mehlman for allowing me to quote from his yet unpublished lecture.
13. On the question of uniqueness and universality, see Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La Concurrence des victimes: génocide, identité, reconnaissance* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997). Among many other documents, Chaumont analyzes the debate which erupted in the journal *Midstream* between 1980 and 1984 (see especially vol. 30:4 [April 1984]: 14-18) between Pierre Papazian, E. Alexander, Yehuda Bauer, A. L. Eckardt and R. A. Eckardt. The Eckardts, aware that structurally any historic event is unique, coined the phrase "unique uniqueness" for the Holocaust. Chaumont also discusses the journal *Judaism*'s yearly symposium that took place in New York in 1967 with Emil Fackenheim, Richard Popkin, George Steiner and Elie Wiesel.

According to Chaumont, this symposium established the dogma of the absolute uniqueness on spiritual and religious instead of historical grounds. See also Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001). Bauer rejects both the dogma of absolute uniqueness and the risk of trivialization. He contends that the Holocaust is "unprecedented," which is to say neither unrepeatable nor incomprehensible. Bauer does not highlight differences with previous and following genocides in order to sacralize the Holocaust, but out of historical rigor. Bauer's approach, compared to Wiesel's or the Eckardts', is both secular and dialectical. Singularity is not conceivable without the possibility of comparing. Comparison appears as the necessary condition for salvaging differences rather than dissolving them.

14. See Yehuda Bauer, "Whose Holocaust?", *Midstream,* 26:9 (November 1980), 45. To reclaim the suffering of one's community is fair enough, as long as this claim is not accompanied by violent and unambiguously anti-Semitic charges (see particularly the Dieudonné affair, documented on the online newspaper http://www.proche-orient.info.fr and also in Pierre-André Taguieff, *Prêcheurs de haine: traversée de la judéophobie planétaire* [Paris: Fayard, 2004]).
15. See Bauer "Whose Holocaust?".
16. On the crucial difference between "racial" and "political" deportees, see Chaumont's *La Concurrence des victimes,* and Annette Wieviorka, "Deportation and Memory: Official History and the Rewriting of World War II," in Alvin H. Rosenfeld, ed., *Thinking about the Holocaust After Half a Century* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), 273-99.
17. Regarding trauma, language, literature and testimony, see Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991). On impossible mourning and the inability to symbolize, see Julia Kristeva's comments on Marguerite Duras in *Soleil noir*: *dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).
18. Simone Veil, quoted in *La Concurrence des victimes*, 35.
19. According to the American Psychiatric Association's definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), trauma is an event "outside the range of usual human experience." See Caruth, 3.
20. On shaming the victim and perpetuating the shaming of the survivor through reading and theorizing testimony, see James Creech's forthcoming essay, "De la honte à la théorie," in *Lire, écrire la honte*, proceedings of a conference at Cerisy-la-Salle, June 2003, Bruno Chaouat, ed. (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, forthcoming). Creech elaborates a compelling critique of the "*indicible*" argument through a thorough scrutiny of Charlotte Delbo, Robert Antelme's preface to *L'Espèce humaine* and Maurice Blanchot's appropriation of Antelme's testimony in *L'Entretien infini.*
21. On the silence of Auschwitz, see André Neher's *The Exile of the Word: From Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz*, David Maisel, trans. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981). Neher's perspective is less historical than spiritual. The silence of Auschwitz, which is indeed an empirical feature of this particular genocide as Neher shows, also serves a mystical, apocalyptical function for André Neher. See also, on issues regarding religious and literary responses to the Holocaust as an irreversible breach of Covenant, Beth Hawkins's insightful book, *Reluctant Theologians: Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, Edmond Jabès* (New York: Fordham UP, 2003).
22. Annette Wieviorka, "Indicible ou inaudible? La Déportation: premiers récits (1944-47)," *Pardes*, 9-10 (1989), 23-25.
23. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout* (Paris: Minuit, 2003).
24. Alain Finkielkraut, *Le Juif imaginaire* (Paris: Seuil,1980), 19.
25. Hegel: "Reading the newspaper in early morning is a kind of realistic morning prayer. One orients one's attitude against the world and toward God [in one case], or toward that which the world is [in the other]. The former gives the same security as the latter, in that one knows where one stands." Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben* (Berlin, 1844; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 543.
26. To use Jacques Tarnero's phrase, *Mai 68: la révolution fiction* (Toulouse: Édition Milan, 1998).
27. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficile liberté: essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 2003).
28. See the dossier published in *Le Monde* on the occasion of the Marie L. affair, in the summer of 2004, especially Cécile Prieur, "L'Affaire Marie L. révèle une société obsédée par ses victimes" (*Le Monde*, 8/21/04).
29. Chaumont, *La Concurrence des victimes,* section 2, "Le temps de la gloire (1967-…)."
30. In an article written on June 4, 1967, quoted by Annette Wieviorka, "Deportation and Memory," 286. See also Raymond Aron, *De Gaulle, Israël et les juifs* (Paris: Plon, 1968): "Si les grandes puissances … laissent détruire le petit État d'Israël qui n'est pas le mien, ce crime modeste à l'échelle du monde m'enlèverait la force de vivre," 70.

31. See Emmanuel Levinas's dazzling analysis, as early as 1965, two years before the Six-Day War: "As for Israel, after so much insistence on its meaning as a state, it has been reduced to political categories. But its builders found themselves suddenly on the side of colonialists. The independence of Israel was right away labeled as imperialism, oppression of natives, racism … For the first time perhaps in their history, Jews find themselves relegated to the side of Reaction and their hearts are torn between the instinctive certainty of their adhesions and a no less uncompromising progressivism." *Difficile liberté: essais sur le judaïsme*, 309 (my translation).
32. Such mixture could already be found in the later Heidegger.
33. Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 90-91. See also, on Plato's *Timaeus*, Jacques Derrida, *Khôra* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).
34. Serge Doubrovsky, *Corneille ou la dialectique du héros* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).
35. Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 551.
36. On Roland Barthes, Baudelaire, allegory, history and photography, see Elissa Marder, "Flat Death: Snapshots of History" *Diacritics*, 22:3/4 (Fall-Winter 1992): 128-44.
37. It is all the more puzzling as twenty years earlier, in "La Littérature et le droit à la mort," in *La Part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), Blanchot had associated literature with the reign of Terror. The experience of writing, like the historic event of Terror, was encapsulated in the revolutionary slogan, "La liberté ou la mort." In the immediate post-war, the "tranchant de la mort" worked, for Blanchot, as an allegory of the literary experience.
38. On a critical history of the ontology of death from Hegel to Blanchot, see Jonathan Strauss, "After Death" in *Diacritics*, 30:3 (Fall 2000).
39. On this question, see mainly Emmanuel Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre* (1947) (Paris: PUF, 1994).
40. On French postmodern *Trauerspiel* and its relation to Aushchwitz, see Elisabeth J. Bellamy, *Affective Genealogies: Psychoanalysis, Postmodernism, and the "Jewish Question" After Auschwitz* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1997). More pointedly, and also on the difference and similarities in thinking death in Blanchot and Levinas, see Gillian Rose's intriguing *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1996): "Blanchot … has presented a mimesis of the *Trauerspiel*, the mourning play, of Jewish exilic history…" (115).
41. See Emmanuel Levinas, "Souffrance inutile" in *Entre nous: essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* (Paris: Grasset, 1976).
42. For a balanced inquiry on Jewish resistance and historians' own resistance to it, see Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust.*
43. Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger et "les juifs"* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 53.
44. See *Robert Antelme: Humanity, Community, Testimony* (Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Research Centre University of Oxford, 2003), 68-72.
45. I have myself succumbed to the temptation, in previous papers. See Chaouat, "'La Mort ne recèle pas tant de mystère': Robert Antelme's Defaced Humanism" in *L'Esprit Créateur*, 40:1 (2000): 88-99, and "Ce que chier veut dire: les ultima excreta de Robert Antelme" in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, 261 (2001): 147-62.
46. See also Lyotard's *L'Inhumain: causeries sur le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), and "La Main-mise," *Un trait d'union* (Grenoble: PU de Grenoble, 1997).
47. In a time when anti-Semitism is often expressed in the name of anti-racism.
48. See Jean-François Lyotard, "Europe, the Jews, and the Book (1990)" in *Political Writings* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993), 159-62.
49. "Et l'on voit les exégètes nazis discuter pesamment sur la question de savoir si, d'une manière précise, les Juifs sont un 'antipeuple' ou un 'pseudo-peuple,'" Léon Poliakov, *Bréviaire de la haine* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1951), 7. If the question of whether the Jews are a people, an anti-people or a pseudo-people was an anti-Semitic question, it has uncannily returned as a postmodern, philo-Semitic motif. Giorgio Agamben has thus alleged that the Jews exemplify the positive definition of a people, while the Nazi *Volk* exemplifies the negative, nationalistic, fascist definition. See "What Is a People?", *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000).
50. See Elisabeth Bellamy, *Affective Genealogies*.
51. Jean-Claude Milner, *Les Penchants criminels de l'Europe démocratique* (Paris: Editions Verdier, 2003).
52. Jeffrey Mehlman, "A New Judeocentrism?".
53. See Christophe Jakubyszyn with Caroline Cordier and Mustapha Kessous, "L'Appel de Sharon aux juifs de France soulève l'indignation," *Le Monde* (7/20/2004).
54. Eric Marty, *Bref séjour à Jerusalem* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).