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**Joan B. Wolf**, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France*. Palo Alto, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004. xii + 249 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.50 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8047-4889-6.

Review by K. H. Adler, University of Nottingham.

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In spring 1995, a silent group processed across the Seine to the Ile de la Cité led by a man in tails bearing a wreath. As usual for the annual deportation commemoration, the wreath was laid at the memorial pictured on the cover of the book under review. Less habitual were the shape of the wreath--a large triangle fashioned from pink roses--and the youth of most participants. One would also have noticed the distinct lack of solemnity of their reception by former resisters who, having completed their own ceremonial, were packing up flags and milling about discontentedly. This was the first time that Paris, and possibly France, had witnessed an officially sanctioned commemoration of the deportation of homosexuals from occupied Europe. Like the panoply of events discussed in Joan Wolf's book, it occurred within the context of competing public claims on the Holocaust. The array of ambivalent and contradictory responses elicited from brief interviews with some of those present (not to mention contradictions in the event itself) should alert us to the complexities of discourses of mass murder.

Wolf tackles these discourses with singular focus and a fine understanding of nuance and textual workings. Her careful readings reveal how shifting meanings of the destruction of European Jewry became a means by which people in France negotiated their own changing sense of nationhood in the last third of the twentieth century. The author uses the periodic flare-ups of interest in matters associated with Jews or Vichy between the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the 1998 trial of Maurice Papon for crimes against humanity to clarify what she calls the "narrative politics" (p. 3 and passim) surrounding the Holocaust that, while "dominated by the Holocaust... [was] not always about Jews" (p. 24). She incorporates debates arising from the bombings of a synagogue and Jewish restaurant in Paris, an Auschwitz survivor's introduction to parliament of more relaxed anti-abortion laws, the desecration of a Jewish cemetery, an interview with a Vichy administrator of antisemitic affairs, revelations about François Mitterrand's right-wing past, Holocaust denial literature, and the trials of Holocaust perpetrators Klaus Barbie and Paul Touvier, interpreting them as exercises in helping French people explain France to themselves. [1] Source material consists largely of journals aimed at Jewish readers and mass market periodicals, plus several publications targeted at Catholic, Trotskyist, and extreme right readers. A Gallic partner to Peter Novick's work on North American attitudes toward the Holocaust, Wolf's book establishes both the extent to which the mass murder of Jews took centre stage during her period, and teases out some of its less obvious meanings.[2] We can situate her book within the effervescence of memory literature published over the last two decades [3] whose proliferation has been such that one of its chief architects, Henry Rousso, has called for its cessation [4]--a call not lost on Wolf, who frames her work as a riposte to what she convincingly sees as his misplaced anxiety. The book also ranks in a growing literature on the meanings of "Jews" in modern(ising) Europe.[5]

After 1967, says Wolf, the Holocaust "became a metaphor for various phenomena that could be represented in terms of persecutors and victims" (p. 2). Hitherto, expressions of Jewish suffering had been principally integrated into those of French suffering during the Second World War. In any case, the Jewish experience of the Occupation as suffering was frequently subordinated to one of Jewish heroism, exemplified in Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemorations. This depiction changed during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war when a battle between victim and persecutor was described with repeated reference to the betrayal of Munich 1938, though the victim's identity lurched from being Israel and Jews at the beginning of the war, to Arabs by its end. In the process, "the Holocaust moved from Jewish to national debate" and became available for narration "in theoretically limitless ways" (p. 48). In the 1970s, perpetrator, that is, Nazi, status was mapped on to both Israel and non-Israeli individual Jews. Auschwitz survivor Simone Veil was roundly attacked as inaugurating a new Holocaust by Catholics unhappy with changes to abortion legislation. Her position was not helped by an unsupportive President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, whose break with the Gaullist-resister right-wing continuum was not insignificant.

After the Paris synagogue on the Rue Copernic was bombed in 1980, “assimilated” Jews whose Jewishness had formerly remained private, began to speak “as Jews.” At this point, what had become the “metaphor of the Holocaust” was joined by the scare-quoted “Jew” (and later, though Wolf omits this, “the jew”), which could then metamorphose into a universal victim of the “we are all Jews” variety.[6] “To the extent that it was symbolic of a more generalized threat,” says Wolf, “the Copernic attack aroused the mass indignation of the French population; to the degree that it could be emptied of specifically Jewish content, Jewish suffering became a source of identification” (p. 94). But metaphorical boundaries blur and original sources fade. With “Jews” representing limitless victims, and any aggressive state (though especially the Jewish state) equated with Nazism, the entire Second World War period soon became available for distortion. By the time of Klaus Barbie’s trial, the defendant’s left-wing lawyer, Jacques Vergès, had only to instrumentalise what had become a paradigm of evil. In philosopher Alain Finkielkraut’s astute formulation: “The French at Sétif, Americans at My Lai, Jews of the UGIF or Zionists at Deir Yassin, the whole world is Nazi, said Mr. Vergès, in effect, the whole world except the Nazis themselves” (p. 124). Subsequent debates formulated the Holocaust as proxy for Vichy (during the Touvier trial), while the Papon trial made it stand “not just for the Vichy regime but for the French state throughout history” (p. 158).

In line with numerous studies, Wolf argues that Jews in France discussed the Holocaust from a traumatised perspective.[7] But trauma, while clear enough at the individual level, is less apparent for collectivities, knowable essentially via their political, artistic or journalistic expression, itself incommensurate with the anguished utterances of the traumatised. When the collectivity is as heterogeneous (and sizeable, for remember that France had the second largest Jewish population in Europe) as French Jewish communities, trauma becomes less visible. Just how hazy is revealed when Wolf asserts that “the Holocaust was clearly a part of Jewish consciousness, even if they spoke of it only infrequently beyond the... Jewish community” (p. 30). Precisely what “Jewish consciousness” is and how it might be measured is unclear, but it is presumably more than the sum of the parts “they” comprise. Wolf herself confounds our comprehension of “Jewish consciousness” when she observes that “Jewish unity... was more precarious than it might have seemed, especially around the issue of Jewish identity” (p. 48). No matter how often she avers that trauma was the definitive factor in Jews’ response to the events recounted (the index contains thirty-five entries under “Holocaust trauma” and eleven under “trauma”), its only instance that I could positively establish was Claude Lanzmann’s. While filming *Shoah* in 1979, he referred to the Holocaust as “an hiatus, a jump, an abyss” that contained an “implacable nudity” and was “arid and incomparable” (p. 75). Yet the conundrum persists of a skilled artist who contends that trauma was an absolute collective response when much of his work has been dedicated to exploring and, arguably beyond his intentions, explaining the Holocaust. Might not the struggle for Holocaust ownership that Wolf so effectively analyses rest on a rather more complex mix of historical, political and social factors that are awkward to cram into the single explanatory container of trauma? And might not Wolf do herself something of an injustice here, since her account extends well beyond these self-imposed restrictions?

Overall, the book is written with verve and perspicacity. Mention does need to be made of translation problems that are regrettably prominent, however. Stock French phrases are translated literally rather than into an English equivalent and everything appears to have been sieved into English including, inexplicably, place names. Apart from one chapter on Touvier, the reader repeatedly stumbles over translated quotations, of which there are a great number. I have read them all. Other readers may be less patient and this would be a pity, for Wolf has chosen them well and her commentary is often acute.

However, in many places it is unclear whether one is reading authorial comment or not, given the tendency to summarise quotations in the present tense rather than as reported speech. Coupled with the not infrequent desire for texts to speak for themselves, this confusion can give an impression of ahistoricism. For example, Wolf points to “a universalization of the Barbie trial... to a seemingly limitless expanse of issues having to do with persecution and victimization” (p. 114). Without indicating her source’s politics, she then quotes the right-wing newspaper *Rivarol*’s claim that the 1945 Dresden bombings were like “a gigantic gas chamber” in which “250,000” people were killed in two days (p. 114). *Rivarol*’s wild exaggerations go unaddressed, so that this figure, which has circulated continuously in Nazi and right-wing literature, gains new credence, although it inflates the death toll by something like ten times. Wolf may not be attempting to set the historical record straight but only to trace how mass circulation creates stories. Reproducing them denuded of comment, however, mimics the original discursive gesture.

When she does turn to discourse, her analysis is refined, and dissects subtle shifts in tenor that indicate France’s profound immersion in a metaphorical Holocaust that was increasingly divorced from Jews, present or past. For all

these explorations, the reader remains eager to understand why the shifts occurred, and for more attention to history. Occasionally, this could be satisfied with more background (e.g., on events preceding the 1967 war). Elsewhere broader historical contextualisation would dampen the suspicion that the discourses progressed less logically than the text implies. For instance, Jews' apparently crucial distinction between "true France" and "official France" (pp. 54-5 and *passim*) is presented as though late-twentieth-century Jews cleverly devised new means to distance themselves from distasteful aspects of their country. Had the Maurrassian origins of these imagined opposing Frances been reviewed, analysis of Jews' confrontation of their compatriots with claims that "true France" included democracy, moderation, and diversity that would permit loyalty to France and simultaneous commitment to Israel's survival, would be far keener. The author's perplexity that French Zionists in 1948 depicted themselves unproblematically as republicans and the puzzling explanation of differences between various resistance groups may then have been resolved (p. 206, note 6).

Nor does Wolf need to rely on ready-made and seemingly self-evident explanatory instruments. Her reading of Jewish communal divergences as generational confrontation might thus productively have been interpreted in terms of gender. More than rowdy youngsters, was it not a new masculinity that emerged in Israel after 1967 and France from about 1980? Its violence was less rejected, as Wolf argues, than legitimated by its framing as "defence" and by Jewish communities' willingness to employ beefy, often Israeli-trained, young men as guards. Likewise, "assimilation" is too complex a concept to be flatly associated with Ashkenazim against openly Jewish Sephardim (i.e., of North African origin). It may be that the latter "did not share the political culture" of assimilation, but that culture hardly stemmed from a seamless "Ashkenazi Jew[ish] nearly 200-year history as French citizens" (p. 88). The story of assimilation is constantly disrupted and constrained by that of immigration, not to mention class (or indeed the 1940-44 Vichy period itself). Rather than any elemental Ashkenazi-Sephardi dichotomy, there exist more continuities than implied between Wolf's period and preceding ones; successive waves of Jewish immigration repeatedly disturbed fault-lines between incomers and residents.

It is here that "narrative politics" leave one thirsty for a deeper approach to political issues of ethnic difference. I disagree that the "globalization of the workforce" (p. 22) engendered more immigration and that unification of Europe was as seismically novel as Wolf implies (pp. 22-3, 174-5). Moreover, couldn't the discovery of surprising unity around Jean-Marie Le Pen's crass dismissals of the Holocaust rest less on the Holocaust itself than on widespread, if unarticulated, agreement with his racism? Discourse analysis is a handy tool to analyse the absent as well as the manifest, but its relatively free-floating nature needs greater anchoring in history so that we understand the roots and reasons for change. As for Le Pen, it is disappointing that a work published twenty months after the 2002 presidential elections still maintains that he "never came close to attracting a majority of French voters" (p. 22). While his quantitative share of the vote never allowed him to come within striking distance of the Elysée Palace, his devastating appearance on the 2002 second round ballot paper instead of incumbent Prime Minister Lionel Jospin deserves more attention than Wolf's remark suggests.

Wolf amply fulfils her promise to demonstrate that the Holocaust and, by extension, Jews, became "a screen onto which [were] projected concerns that are only marginally about Jews" (p. 191). As regards screening, it would have been illuminating to read her take on what Michel Foucault (not Henry Rousso [p. 21]) dubbed the "mode rétro" films, even if these are scarcely untouched sources, and the vituperative polemic around Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, chiefly orchestrated by Claude Lanzmann who contrived an identity as Spielberg's arch enemy.[8] None of these criticisms detracts from the book's worth as a whole. I find it a highly suggestive and pertinent addition to the field whose overview of the period painstakingly links what have heretofore been considered a series of disparate outbursts. It successfully undermines Rousso's accusations that "Judeocentrism" erased non-Holocaust topics from the French Second World War agenda, arguing with persuasive sophistication how far from centring on Jews France's prolonged Holocaust debates have been.

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## NOTES

[1] The reviews editors have asked me to explain why I prefer the term “antisemitism” to “anti-Semitism”, as I consider it a specific, historically-located concept that refers to hatred of Jews (not Semitic peoples more broadly), and one that is unlike other sorts of hyphenated antipathies, such as “anti-smoking” or “anti-Japanese”.

[2] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York, 1999). It is noteworthy that when Novick’s book appeared in Europe, the French translation retained distinct reference to the US, while the German and British versions implied that the book discussed some kind of universal uptake of Holocaust memory (the British one by banishing the subtitle from the front cover): *L’Holocauste dans la vie américaine* trans. Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat (Paris, 2001); *Nach dem Holocaust. Der Umgang mit dem Massenmord* trans. Irmela Arnsperger and Boike Rehbein (Stuttgart, 2001); *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (London, 2000).

[3] For example, Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols (Paris 1984-92); Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Les Juifs: La mémoire et le présent* (Paris, 1981); Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, 1982).

[4] See Henry Rousso, ‘The historian, a site of memory’ in Sarah Fishman et al., eds., *France at War: Vichy and the Historians* (Oxford, 2000).

[5] Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley, 2003); Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003).

[6] Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger et les juifs* (Paris, 1988).

[7] See Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, 1994); Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, 1995); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, 1992); Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford, 1999); Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, 1991).

[8] Pascal Bonitzer and Serge Toubiana, “Entretien avec Michel Foucault”, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 251–52 (July-August 1974), p. 5.

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