

Jewish Identity
in French Cinema
(1950-2010)

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By

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FOR AURORE AND BENJAMIN

*THE CHINESE ARE CHINESE NOT
BECAUSE THERE IS SOMETHING
IN CHINA THAT WOULD MAKE
THEM CHINESE, THE CHINESE
ARE CHINESE BECAUSE THERE IS
A CHINESE CIVILIZATION.*

—PIERRE GOUROU

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INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of cinema, French filmmakers have addressed Jewish issues in complex and sometimes ambiguous ways. The most horrific chapter in modern world history happened in Europe, and perhaps more than any other medium, films shape how we understand and remember the Holocaust. For many years following World War II, marked by guilt or indifference, compassion or ignorance, the French movie industry was silent. This desire to ignore and forget was shared by a majority in France, non-Jews and Jews alike.¹ The publication in France of *Vichy France*, by American historian Robert O. Paxton, coupled with the release of Marcel Ophuls's documentary *Le Chagrin et la pitié* put an end to the Gaullist indulgence and myth. *Le Chagrin et la pitié* shattered the myth of the two sides which had argued that de Gaulle and Pétain were two sides of a coin. The former was the sword, the latter was the shield. With an avid renewed need to understand, numerous film productions were devoted to the representation of the destruction of French Jewry, and soon Jewish-identity topics became a frequent constituent of French cinema. Afterwards, when film production moved away from war stories, French cinema continued to explore Jewish issues and identity.²

Scholarly works on what can be considered a new genre of film include several major pieces written on French cinema, from the work of André Pierre Colombat, *The Holocaust in French Films*;

¹ On the issue of general amnesia in France after World War II, see Eric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* (1994. Paris: Fayard-Pluriel, 2013).

² Home to the second largest film industry in the Western world, France produced over 4,000 films from 1950 to 2010, of which over 200 fictional features were devoted to various Jewish-identity topics, a much larger number than the so-called Jewish Hollywood during the same period.

the volume of articles edited by Jean-Michel Frodon, *Le Cinéma et la Shoah*; to the book *Révolution au paradis*, in which author Yehuda Moraly advances the idea that French films released during World War II contain the same propaganda as the anti-Semitic documentaries of the era. Although there have been numerous contributions made to movies catalogued as what is now referred to as "Holocaust films," little writing devoted to the depiction of Jewish identity in French cinema has been published. The latter formulation needs to be explained because there is a corpus of works devoted to the representation of Jews in French films, especially in Holocaust films. However, even if I look at figures of the Jew, my goal is not to add another study of the representation of the Jew in French cinema, but to study Jewish identity in French cinema.

Jewish identity is a broad concept and difficult to define.³ Some scholars differentiate between *identification*, one's process of seeing oneself as part of the Jewish group, and *identity*, the content of one's Jewishness. Most studies focus on representation which is a phenomenon consisting of physical appearance, ritual behavior, institutional participation, social ties, attitudes towards Israel, religious beliefs, and knowledge of Judaism. Undoubtedly, the very notion of Jewish identity is challenging because Judaism consists of overlapping and intertwined elements of religion, culture, nationality, and ethnicity.

In 1983, Annette Insdorf published a major study which is, with her subsequent editions, probably the most comprehensive and up-to-date discussion of films from around the world about the Holocaust.⁴ In 1986, the French journal *CinémAction* devoted an entire issue to cinema and Judaism, including articles from Jewish

³ In an meticulous article, "Jewish Identity Research: A State of the Art," Erik Cohen presents and discusses the methodology of studying Jewish identity with an overview of comparative studies, typologies, and theoretical writings on Jewish identity coupled with an extensive bibliography. Cf. *International Journal of Jewish Education Research*, Vol. 1, February 2010:7-48.

⁴ Cf. *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (1983. Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

and non-Jewish scholars and film specialists from different horizons and political families. The issue was not solely devoted to Holocaust films, but also included contemporary Israeli films and pre-war Yiddish cinema. The objectives of the editors, Annie Goldmann and Guy Hennebelle, were to touch upon the different facets of Jewish cultures (Ashkenazim, Sephardim, European, American) that would define the original Jewish contribution to cinematography as art and industry, the depiction of Jews in films, and the cinema's treatment of Jewish themes worldwide. A testament to the difficulties faced by the project, the publication was simply titled "*Cinéma et judéité*."⁵

In recent years, there has been growing concern and increased attention to the issue of national identity in France.⁶ The present essay is an introduction and discussion on the theme of an evolving Jewish identity over the last sixty years in French cinema (1950-2010) and its correlation with the larger question of a French national identity.

For the purpose of this work the survey of French films reviewed begins in 1950, due to the fact that it took the French movie industry several years after World War II to resume its prewar production. More important, the awareness of a distinct

⁵ While published over thirty years ago, this issue remains a valuable and seminal contribution to the topic. Cf. *CinémAction*, No. 37, février 1986:164-67. Several articles include a bibliography, mostly in French. For an English bibliography, see "Jews in Films and TV" at the library of the University of California at Berkeley <<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/JewishBib.html>>. On a similar topic in French literature, see Charlotte Wardi, *Le Juif dans le roman français* (Paris: Nizet, 1973).

⁶ On Jewish identity and France, see Shmuel Trigano, "From Individual to Collectivity: The Rebirth of the 'Jewish Nation in France'," in *The Jew in Modern France*. Edited by Frances Malino and Bernard Wasserstein (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985). Trigano criticizes the centrality of the emancipation paradigm for French Jewry and concludes: "The only way for the Jews to exist in France is to be elsewhere" (261). See also the special issue "Discourses of Jewish Identity in Twentieth-Century France," edited by Alan Astro, *Yale French Studies*, No. 85 (1994).

French-Jewish identity, as it came to be known, can be considered a result of World War II. Before the war and the laws of the Vichy government, Jews of France were expected to be just *Français israélites*, French citizens of Jewish descent, or *Français de confession israélite*, as it was fashionable to say. It was only under the French State of Vichy that the French Jews became legally designated as a distinct population from the French nation.

I closed my examination ten years after the beginning of the new century as many things changed after 2010 for the Jews of France. In 2009 when I began my research of Jewish identity in French movies, the social climate was not at all like the situation France finds itself in today. The country is currently witnessing a growing amount of anti-Semitism and it is very probable that this new awareness is going to impact and drastically modify the emergence of a new vision of Jewish identity as well as the treatment of Jewish identity in films. In light of these events, I had to modify the conclusion I first reached when I published parts of this work in 2012.

Over the sixty year span of this review, the French film industry also produced a very large number of documentaries related to Jewish issues and Jewish identity. Some are extremely well known throughout the world and several have even become landmark: *Nuit et brouillard* (Alain Resnais, 1955); *Récits d'Ellis Island* (Robert Bober, 1980); *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985); and *Comme un juif en France, dans la joie ou la douleur* (Yves Jeuland, 2007), to name only a few.⁷

The broadcasting of the American made-for-TV miniseries *Holocaust* (Marvin J. Chomsky, 1978) generated a controversy around the difference between documentary and fiction, specifically in films dealing with Jewish issues during the Holocaust. The core of this disagreement questions whether films dealing with the Shoah should ever be reconstructed, recorded, or staged. In the on-

⁷ Other celebrated documentaries: *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (Marcel Ophüls, 1969); *Premier convoi* (Jacky Assoun and al., 1991); *Les Enfants du Vel' d'Hiv'* (Maurice Frydland, 1992); *Opération Vent printanier : 16-17 juillet 1942 : la rafle du Vel' d'Hiv'* (William Karel and Blanche Finger, 1992); *L'An prochain à Jérusalem* (Myriam Aziza, 2007).

going debate, particularly between American director Steven Spielberg (*Schindler's List*, 1993) and French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann (*Shoah*, 1985), Spielberg believes that no topic is off-limits, whereas Lanzmann condemns and repels what he calls "the suspicious aspect" that images of the holocaust would have. Claude Lanzmann speaks with authority as director of *Shoah*, a ten-hour documentary that was ten years in the making. *Shoah* is credited with triggering "a loud echo in both the reconstruction of the modern relation with the extermination of European Jewry as well as the philosophy and practices of filming documentaries."⁸ For

⁸ Cf. Jean-Michel Frodon, *Le Cinéma français de la Nouvelle Vague à nos jours* (Cahiers du Cinéma: Paris, 2010) 843. Lanzmann's discussion on the validity of the TV series *Holocaust* and *Schindler's List* and the moral and historical implication of the Nazi extermination of Jews during World War II appeared in "From the Holocaust to *Holocaust*," *Dissent*, 28 (2), 1981:188, and also in "Holocaust, la représentation impossible," *Le Monde*, 3 mars 1994:7. On the same topic, see the 2010 documentary by Israeli director Yaël Hersonski, *A Film Unfinished*, which is a critical analysis of *Das Ghetto*. In summer 1942, Nazi filmmakers shot footage in Warsaw for a propaganda film about life in the ghetto. It was never edited into a final film, but four reels of the film were discovered in 1954 in East Germany. With his film, Hersonski offers strong support to Lanzmann's thesis that we cannot trust the evidence of our eyes alone by placing the 1954 footage in a new context, allowing a different interpretation than that intended by the original filmmakers. The outtake reels reveal that most scenes were shot several times, suggesting that they were staged occurrences. One of the scenes shows an upscale cafe in which well-dressed Jews eat, drink, and carry-on conversations. The diary entry of Adam Czerniakow, head of the Warsaw Jewish Council, describes how the patrons of the cafe were assembled for this particular event. Also, see the never-released 1944 film *Theresienstadt: ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem Juedischen Siedlungsgebiet* [*Theresienstadt: a Documentary Film About the Jewish Settlement*]. *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* [*The Führer Gives a City to the Jews*] stands as one of the more cynical films of Nazi Germany. The film is about life in Theresienstadt, a concentration camp arranged as a small city that was intended to portray to the international community that Jews who were being deported from Germany and occupied countries were treated well. Directed by Kurt Gerron, a Jewish director, the film shows orderly streets, shops, a town square, and a bank. It depicts the Jews as

Spielberg, on the other hand, no event can escape the possibility of being filmed; while for Lanzmann, movies showing the mass extermination of Jews, using either fictitious or archived images, would be dishonest since screen images could not effectively authenticate the monstrosity of what actually occurred.⁹ The well-publicized position of Lanzmann is abundantly discussed in several articles of *Le Cinéma et la Shoah*, edited by Jean-Michel Frodon. In his introduction, which specifically deals with the dialectic of films and reality in relation to the Shoah, he frames the issue of documentary versus fiction by advancing:

The classical distinction between documentary and fiction, which should be made with caution, reveals itself in this case as manifestly problematic. There are archives that turn out to be fiction (fabrications which are not admitted as such: propaganda films, for example, those of the period, as well as more recent ones such as the manipulated footage of the Eichmann trials done by Sivan and Brauman in their film *A Specialist* [1999]), and other fictions that are invaluable documents for historians.¹⁰

residents who enjoy both work and leisure activity, including going to concerts and playing soccer. The film includes scenes of Jewish couples happily working in their family vegetable gardens. *Theresienstadt* was a fraud perpetrated against international inspectors to hide the camp's true purpose. After the so-called documentary was completed, the director and actors were deported and gassed at Auschwitz on October 28, 1944. Never shown in its entirety at the time, the hoax was successful and, cut into sequences, was used by German propaganda as newsreel.

⁹ *Au nom de tous les miens* (Robert Enrico, 1983) attempted to recreate the atmosphere of the death camp of Treblinka including a scene of a gas chamber in use. As in Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, director Robert Enrico supplied images where there were none. Several historians challenged some aspects of the gas chamber sequence added by the director, to which Treblinka's survivor Martin Gray answered: "It's not important. What is important, and that you have to bear witness to, is what happened at Treblinka (...)."

¹⁰ Jean-Michel Frodon, *Le Cinéma et la Shoah: un art à l'épreuve de la tragédie du 20e siècle* (Paris: Editions Cahiers du cinéma, 2007) 14.

For some scholars and film directors, every film is a film of fiction whose impression of reality is based on the efficiency of an established narrative. Though naive spectators demand a truthful representation from movies, feature films do not treat reality as sacredly as do documentaries. They openly assume a personal human element, a lie, or a symbol that is a point of view to tell a story. For films of fiction, imagination assumes the main role. Documentaries are works that more specifically and directly deal with reality rather than invented stories of fictional films, even when the invented stories are based on actual events. Since this study is not aimed at covering the realities of the Jewish experience in France but rather the depiction and expression of an identity in works of cinematic fiction, documentaries have not been included in this essay. In a few instances, however, when a film director deliberately mixes genres, such as the movie *Drancy Avenir* (1997) by Arnaud des Pallières or *Voyages* (1999) by Emmanuel Finkiel, I chose to include them in my corpus of feature films.

Whereas interest in France for Jewish-related topics spawned a large assortment of motion pictures to be considered, there is, nevertheless, a theoretical and practical need to set the limits of my corpus. It is not because a film features a Jewish character or contains a scene with a synagogue that a movie has been included in my list. After much consideration, I have required a Jewish-identity film in French cinema to have three properties: it must be a (mostly) French-speaking movie; it must be financed by French producers; and it must deal with Jewish issues, whether obvious or hidden, that have relevancy for the unfolding of the narrative. Since I am not looking for representations, I have not included a great number of films where, although they may have Jewish characters, the narrative is not influenced or driven by a Jewish issue, such as Claude Lelouch's *Robert et Robert* (1978), Claude Chabrol's *La Ligne de démarcation* (1966) and *Les Fantômes du chapelier* (1982), Robert Enrico's *De guerre lasse* (1987), and Jacques Audiart's *Un Héros très discret* (1996). This list is not exhaustive since it could include all the films that take place during the Occupation.

In France, the fascination level for films with Jewish-related topics has always been high, and there is an impressive quantity of

works. I reviewed over 200 feature-length films produced between 1950 and 2010. Of those, I identified over 144 that match my definition of a Jewish-identity film (see Descriptive Filmography). Obviously, this long list of movies probing a Jewish identity does not pretend to be conclusive and/or could vary according to the refinement of the criteria chosen. It was also particularly difficult to find and view the many films produced for French television called *téléfilms*, of which only a few are categorized as full features.¹¹

Of the examples from the list I have chosen to use, a few films are discussed at length, others are simply mentioned, while some are only referenced in the Descriptive Filmography. When a film exemplifies a new trend, I discuss it in detail and present an analysis that is always based on my direct screening of the movie. The films referenced and mentioned are also based on a direct screening; however, in two instances when films were not available either in France or the United States, *Déclat et des claques* (Philippe Clair, 1965) and *Donnez moi dix hommes désespérés* (Pierre Zimmer, 1962), editorial information was gleaned from critical reviews, interviews of the directors, and excerpts available online.

There are other noteworthy films that are not included in the list, as they do not meet the stated criteria for Jewish identity. Among them is the World War I French film *Joyeux Noël* (2005) directed by Christian Caron. Even though the German officer, guilty of going along with the allied-forces truce during Christmas 1914 and subsequently sent to the Russian front with his men, turns out to be Jewish, his Jewish identity is not revealed until the end of the film.

¹¹ The *Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée* (CNC), an agency of the French government that provides funding to support national film production, makes a distinction between feature films and *téléfilm*. A *téléfilm* is produced by television studios for the purpose of being shown solely on television. They are not recorded in the same category as feature films and are often omitted from a director's list of films. When a *téléfilm* has a very successful showing on television, it may be released in movie theaters. Only then will it be counted as a feature film and not a *téléfilm*. *Donnez-moi dix hommes désespérés* and *La Journée de la jupe* were first *téléfilms* before being released on the big screen.

Also not included are three French productions that have dialogues in English: *Amen* (2002), directed by Costa-Gravas; *The Pianist* (2002), directed by Roman Polanski; and *Ô Jerusalem* (2006), directed by Elie Chouraqui. Additionally, I did not include Yolande Zauberman's *Moi Ivan, toi Abraham* (1993) since this dark and beautiful film, in spite of its original French title, French director, and French financing, does not have one word uttered in French.¹²

Films of fiction may not be slices of reality, but they are born of a living society and reflect its evolution. They are carefully crafted to convey a particular meaning, and a fictional motion picture will always illustrate a particular reality at a particular time. On this basis, I propose three chronological types of films that illustrate a changing Jewish identity in French cinema since 1950. First, immediately following World War II, the films of what I call the underground Jew or *Hidden Jew*, "*le juif caché*," appeared. Twenty years later, films presented a contradictory identity of Jewishness and Frenchness which I call the *Paradoxical Jew*, "*le juif paradoxal*." More recently in the past twenty years, there has been

¹² The *Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée* (CNC) allocates financial support to movies only when more than half of the financing is French. *L'Académie des arts et techniques du cinéma*, an organization made up of professionals of the French movie industry that awards *Les Césars* each year, also recognizes a motion picture as French when over half of the production financing is from French monies. Accordingly, for the CNC and the *Académie*, *The Pianist* (Roman Polanski, 2002), a motion picture in English, without French actors, shot on location in Germany, and filmed by a Franco-Polish director, is considered a French film. In 2002, *The Pianist* received both the American *Oscar* for Best Motion Picture and the *César* for best French film; however, I did not include *The Pianist* in my list as it is not a French-speaking film. Also omitted are several Israeli films including *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Forman, 2008), even though it is a Franco-Israeli production and the dialogue is almost entirely in Hebrew. France coproduces many Israeli films, and most of them are in Hebrew. The film *Va, vis et deviens* (Radu Mihaileanu, 2005) was placed on the list since it is primarily a French production, with French actors, and the dialogues are in both Hebrew and French.

an emergence of films portraying the complete Jew or *Total Jew*, "*le Juif total*."

Throughout the sixty year span, each category of films collectively experienced a gradual progression and transformation paving the way for the next. But although the categories often overlapped, they did not automatically replace each other. When films of a new category of fictional Jewish identity emerged, those of the preceding sensitivity did not cease to be made. Their production simply dwindled or slowly faded away. Sometimes, films of different types even coexisted in the same year of production. As the three categories were introduced to moviegoers, each in specific order, they reflected the emergence of a new direction of the Jewish portrait in France and, in turn, gave birth to a new perspective of Jewish identity in French films.

France granted civil rights to Jews on September 27, 1791, making them full French citizens. In 1807, a French version of Judaism was created when Napoléon summoned a Jewish high court called the *Grand Sanhédrin*. This assembly established a new *Franco-Judaism* that defined French Jewry: the convergence between the essence of Judaism and Modern France, finding its roots in the *Déclarations des Droits de l'Homme* of 1789 and the Ten Commandments and promoting its ideology through the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. This Gallic Jewish identity created by the *Sanhédrin* was in complete symbiosis with the French nation and its culture.¹³ Fast-forward to October 1940, and a different collective destiny suddenly emerged, not due to any actions by French Jews but because of the racial laws imposed by the Vichy State.

After World War II and the creation of Israel, French Jewry, because of its love for France and her secular laws, began a vigorous internal debate over the acceptability of a French-Jewish

¹³ In 2015, Professor Stephen Lequet points out in the *Archives israélites* of 1880, that scholar and journalist Isidore Cahen qualifies the French Revolution as the "second law of the Sinai." Cf. "*Vive le franco-judaïsme*," *Le Huffington Post*, 13 mai 2015.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/stephen-lequet/franco-judaisme-_b_2948855.html>

identity and sought clarification of the alternative ideological options for Jews living inside the diaspora and outside the Jewish state. As many Jews in France do not consider themselves immigrant but rather as old citizens ingrained and deeply rooted in their country and its heritage, I analyze the ways in which stories incorporating Jewish identities relate to French society. I also examine how individual films attempt to reflect actual experiences at a certain time, with or without the persistence of certain conventions and modifications that occurred in accordance with the history of the Jews of France.

Several remarks are still necessary relative to the limitation of this endeavor. Common consent agrees that there is no definition of Jewishness that is universally agreed upon, as there is no common agreement of precisely who or what is Jewish. As genetic science has already proved in each country with a Jewish population, a particular national Jewish group possesses the same genetic characteristics as the general population around them. Nevertheless, each national Jewish group within each country has created its own Jewish criteria, its own theory and questioning of Jewish identity, and its own way of claiming Jewishness.

In France, the question of being both Jewish and French has been a fascinating yet daunting issue ever since the French Revolution. Relative to this topic, nothing could be more revealing than the essay of the late French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*. In his inspiring and acclaimed volume, written and published at the end of World War II, Sartre proclaims to bewildered French readers of the time that the Jew does not exist, this after four years in which Vichy racial laws had specifically defined Jewishness. For the French philosopher, a Jewish identity cannot be characterized, and the Jew, he further explains, can only exist thanks to the gaze of another.¹⁴

In this seminal essay, Sartre lists all the difficulties one would find in any endeavor to define the different meanings of Jewishness. For example, if a man identifies himself as a Jew, we do not know

¹⁴ "Le Juif est un homme que les autres hommes tiennent pour juif." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (1946. Paris: Gallimard-Folio, 1985) 83.

in what context and by what measure he considers himself Jewish, or what the term Jewishness means to him. Although the man may identify himself as Jewish, we still would not have much information about this individual. To understand more about this person, we would have to ask many questions, such as what is the country of his ancestors' origin; what is the language of his parents and grandparents; what is his cultural heritage, Sephardim or Ashkenazim; and what are his beliefs? Does this person believe in God or not, and what is his actual relationship with Judaism? For the last seventy years, Sartre's book provided the main theoretical frame of reference for French Jews and non-Jews alike. In order to structure the meaning of a Jewish identity in French films, I used the same composite list of Sartre's questions as part of my research into the Jewish identity in French cinema.

So where does this study begin? As in many other countries, Jews are prevalent in the French motion picture industry, and their influence over the years has left an indelible mark. To create a list of French films that treat topics of Jewish identity, would it be prudent to first consider directors and writers who claim to be Jewish? To make a film is to show certain "realities." However, what we see on the screen is not the actual world, but a representation of the world shown with a certain bias. This means that specific methods used to create a movie bring about ethical stakes for the director who, as principal organizer of the film, has to make a great number of choices. Consider what filmmaker Jacques Rivette famously explains in his short article "*De l'abjection*": "The filmmaker is making a judgment upon what he is showing, and he is judged by the way he is showing it."¹⁵ Thus, is it relevant to

¹⁵ "*Le cinéaste juge ce qu'il montre, et il est jugé par la façon dont il le montre.*" Jacques Rivette, "*De l'abjection*," in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 120, Juin 1961:54. Rpt. in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Novembre 2000. Rivette's brief article was inspired by the film *Kapò* (1959), by Gilles Pontecorvo, whose story takes place in a concentration camp. At one point, a prisoner (Emmanuelle Riva) commits suicide by throwing herself onto an electric barbed-wire fence. According to Rivette, director Pontecorvo "deserves nothing but the most profound contempt" for seeking a spectacular effect

distinguish between the films made by Jews and those of non-Jews? Is there a difference in their treatment of a film?

One investigation might explore the differences between Jewish directors and non-Jewish directors and between Jewish scriptwriters and non-Jewish scriptwriters, comparing their *parti pris*, the treatment of representations of Jewish identity in their various productions. However, cataloguing a motion picture as Jewish-related because the director or the writer is Jewish would present serious flaws.

First, there would be the complicated and confusing challenge of finding out who considers themselves to be Jewish. Even though a filmmaker is said to be Jewish, the type of Jewishness where one claims a personal "feeling of belonging" does not seem to be valid for some. The self-professed Jewish actor and director Roger Hanin does not believe that so-called French-Jewish directors Michel Drach and Claude Lelouch are legitimately Jewish: "Drach, Lelouch, are persons who never claimed to be Jewish. (...) I don't believe they are very interested in being Jewish. Berri, as well, except maybe with *Mazel tov*."¹⁶ Most likely what Hanin seems to express is that these movie directors are complex human beings. Their lives are full of contradictions; they may be agnostics or atheists, as are many French Jews, and thus, have no particular

by using a shot that ends with the reframing of the hand in the angle of its final shot (54).

¹⁶ "Drach, Lelouch, ce sont des gens qui ne sont jamais proclamés Juifs. (...) je crois que cela ne les intéresse pas beaucoup d'être Juifs. Berri, non plus, sauf peut-être avec *Mazel Tov*." Janine Euvrard, "Roger Hanin: 'Il y a un humour juif sépharade spécifique, différent de l'humour juif new-yorkais.'" *CinémAction*, No. 37, février 1986:167. The best example of the intellectual imprudence to look at the possible Jewishness of a film director is, without a doubt, the case of Charlie Chaplin, who is sometimes considered Jewish by some scholars while others advance that he was not. "Of course, anti-Semitic opinion held that Chaplin, too, was a Jew, which he was not," writes Omer Bartov in *The "Jew" in Cinema: From The Golem to Don't Touch my Holocaust* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005) 224. Others have referred to Mathieu Kassovitz as a "Jewish-French" director.

connection to Judaism as an organized religion, even when they insist that they feel Jewish in their hearts, as does Claude Berri.

Second, personal information about the filmmakers is most of the time revealed outside the narrative and is only brought to the attention of spectators by accident. For example, during an interview with director Gilles Paquet-Brenner, he reveals that his mother's family had been sent to the extermination camps, which is why his film *Elle s'appelait Sarah* (2010) is dedicated to their memory. If not under the assumption that the mother of Gilles Paquet-Brenner was Jewish, spectators would have to watch the interview of the filmmaker to be aware of this fact, as it is not revealed anywhere in the movie or the credits.

Third, unless a French Jew can be identified by something other than just the sound of his or her name, spectators of a film, for the most part, will not know if a filmmaker is Jewish or not. The question of one's name, always of great importance in France, is often misleading. In 1962, after the release of *Donnez-moi dix hommes désespérés* (Pierre Zimmer, 1962), detailing the lives and struggles of a group of young French Jews who survived the Shoah and settled in Israel, the late Pierre Charpy, then a famous film critic at the daily left-wing newspaper *Combat* founded by Albert Camus, commented in his review about the director: "Zimmer, who is neither Jewish nor Israeli (...)." ¹⁷ No doubt Charpy added this notation because the movie features a group of Jewish pioneers in Palestine before the creation of the State of Israel, but he probably would not have written this comment had the name of the director been Dupont or Durand, the French equivalent of Jones or Smith.

The question of name assumption is precisely the main argument of the 2010 French movie *Le Nom des gens*, directed by Michel Leclerc. In this comedy, a beautiful, young woman named Sara Benmahmoud, claiming to be of Franco-Arab descent, engages in sex with right-wing men as part of her attempt to change their political loyalty. She even calculates the amount of time needed to convert their allegiance: "One week for a Gaullist, two weeks for a

¹⁷ "Pierre Zimmer qui n'est ni juif, ni Israélien." Pierre Charpy, "Donnez-moi dix hommes désespérés." *Combat*, 12 mai 1962.

[le Pen] National Front,"¹⁸ proudly predicting how long it will take her sexual prowess to flip the men's beliefs and commitments. One day she meets a young man named Arthur Martin at a radio show. Based on his appearance but mostly because of his last name "Martin," she readily assumes that he is a conservative Christian. It turns out that Arthur Martin has a Jewish mother and is himself a Socialist and avid admirer of the former Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. Thwarting Sara's hypothesis, this revelation triggers a series of funny situations punctuated by hilarious dialogues.

Le Nom des gens is based on the assumption of "complete Frenchness," a concept complicated by the confusion and misinterpretation of the name Martin, the most common last name in France. For some Jewish filmmakers, name recognition became a concern even before the war and prompted many in the entertainment industry to substitute a "foreign-sounding name" with a perceived typical Gallic or Frankish surname. The practice of changing names, which had been common in French artistic and literary circles as well as in French society even before the nineteenth century, increased drastically before and after the war when thousands of French Jews officially Gallicized their names.¹⁹ As a matter of fact, following the war and the persecutions of

¹⁸ "Une semaine pour un Gaulliste, deux semaines pour un Front National."

¹⁹ In the first volume of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the narrator's grandfather makes a specialty of uncovering "members of the tribe" behind Gallic names, such as Marcel's friend named Dumont. Once revealed, the old man would yell, "A la garde! A la garde!" to warn the rest of the family of the Hebraic intruder. Later in Proust's last volume *Le Temps retrouvé*, the narrator Marcel pays homage to the talent of his grandfather when he sees his old friend Bloch again whom he hardly recognizes: "I had difficulty in recognizing my friend Bloch, who was now, in fact, no longer Bloch since he had adopted, not merely as a pseudonym but as a name, the style of Jacques du Rozier, beneath which it would have needed my grandfather's flair to detect the 'sweet vale of Hebron' and those 'chains of Israel' which my old schoolmate seemed definitely to have broken." Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time. Time Regained*. Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2003) 6:384.

Vichy, the French government, usually very circumspect, decreed on October 31, 1951, to allow French citizens to change their "Jewish sounding last names," specifically recognized as "*la consonnance israélite d'un nom.*"

Over the last hundred years, scores of Jews in the entertainment industry have adopted a different surname. Prewar film director Jean-Paul Le Chanois was born Jean-Paul Dreyfus. Postwar actor and director Gérard Oury was born Gérard Tannenbaum. The real name of Jean-Pierre Melville, spiritual father of the New Wave, was Grumbach.²⁰ Self-proclaimed Jewish actor and director Roger Hanin was born Lévy. The renowned late French director, writer, and producer Claude Berri, a true icon of French cinema, was born Claude Langmann. Berri, a mogul of the French motion picture industry, never hid his Jewishness and directed several films with Jewish-identity topics choosing the name Berri as his *nom de caméra*. Later in life, according to his autobiography, Claude Berri very much regretted his change of surname, writing sadly: "How was I so stupid as to adopt this ridiculous name of Berri when my name is Langmann."²¹ Shortly after his death, the daily paper *Libération* published a full-page photograph of Claude Berri with the caption: "Claude Langmann a.k.a Berri, 1934-2009, *tes enfants qui t'aiment*" [your loving children]. The use of pseudonyms is not as common today in French cinema, and in contrast to the practice of their elders, most Jewish directors simply use their birth names. For example, Claude Berri's son, Thomas, also a successful movie

²⁰ In his radio show, Michel Ciment told a story about journalist Philippe Labro interviewing Jean-Pierre Melville. Labro began the interview by saying how happy he was to be in the presence of a hero of the French Resistance. Melville answered, "do you know my name?" "Yes," replied Labro, "Jean-Pierre Melville." "No," continued Labro, "my name is Jean-Pierre Grumbach. And if my name had not been Jean-Pierre Grumbach, I could have been Lacombe, Lucien." "*Projection privée*," *France Culture*, Paris, 23 janvier 2010.

²¹ "*Comment ai-je pu être assez stupide pour m'affubler de ce nom ridicule de Berri, quand je m'appelle Langmann?*" Claude Berri, *Autoportrait* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 2005) 23.

producer and director, releases and directs films under his birth name and that of his father, Thomas Langmann.

The question of last names in France mirrors the debate around national identity. Are some Jewish names less French than names from Brittany, the Basque region, or Corsica? After the war, the *Conseil d'Etat*, the highest legal body of the French Republic, questioned the wisdom of a French citizen bearing a foreign-sounding name from abroad, thus encouraging French Jews to change their names. In recent years, however, several families in France have voiced the desire to reclaim their original "Jewish names" as an act of fidelity and reversal of the Nazi efforts to eradicate Jewish identity. To that effect, a collective pressure group named *La Force du nom* (the Power of Name) was created in 2009 to lobby for such a measure.²² In 2012, French authorities modified their original stance of opposition and allowed Jews to once again assume their birth names, restoring a lost piece of their former identity.

A motion picture is a collective enterprise, and it is difficult to isolate, with any accuracy, the respective contributions of writers, producers, and directors. Several self-proclaimed non-Jewish directors, such as Pierre Zimmer, Gilles Bourdos, Joseph Losey, Maurice Pialat, Louis Malle, Thomas Gilou, and Philippe Faucon, have directed some remarkable French films dealing with representations of Jewish identity. For instance, in Maurice Pialat's *A nos amours* (1983), the tense atmosphere of the motion picture reflects, to some degree, the unspoken secret surrounding the representation of a Jewish family on the screen. This malaise could have been induced in the script by writer Arlette Langmann, sister of Claude Berri, or by director Maurice Pialat, with his direction of actors and camera work. The same uncertainty of authorship occurs in the movie *Lacombe, Lucien* (1974) between the respective inputs of writer Patrick Modiano and Christian director Louis Malle.

While there is no doubt that a filmmaker's origin, ethnicity, background, social class, etc., play a role in the autobiographical

²² Cf. Natalie Felzenszwalbe and Céline Masson, *Rendez-nous nos noms! Quand des Juifs revendiquent leur identité perdue* (Paris: Editions Desclée de Brouwer, 2012).

component of film production, men and women who have entered the motion picture industry have done so as individuals, not as representatives of a religious group or a unique cultural community. And while the Jewishness of the writer or the director could be a factor in his or her desire to tell a story, it does not automatically classify a film as one that addresses Jewish identity; only the subject matter and content are relevant and meaningful. Steven Spielberg said that had it not been for the birth of his son in 1985, he would not have directed *Schindler's List*. He also added that members of his family died during the Holocaust. It is obvious that personal stories and events cannot be separated from the history of a people or from the desire of making a film. On the other hand, a filmmaker can be moved by any event. Gilles Bourdos, director of *Disparus* (2001), a movie about a Trotskyist Jewish worker on the eve of World War II, expresses such opinion of creators:

Kubrick did not fight in Vietnam, but he directed *Full Metal Jacket*. My grandfather is not a Trotskyist, nor am I Jewish, or a painter, but I was inspired by my findings on these "vanished" men, the way I have been by reading Primo Levi or looking at Duchamp's work. No man is an island, and all that is human concerns me. What I carry with me, what I take with me, belongs to me. There resides the true autobiography.²³

In summary, this essay describes what I have found to be the three categories of motion pictures representing Jewish identity in French cinema over the sixty year span from 1950 to 2010. Considering the large number of films reviewed for this study, I do not provide a long in-depth analysis for all of the movies in each group. Instead, I focus my analysis more intently and specifically

²³ "Kubrick n'a pas combattu au Vietnam et a pourtant réalisé Full Metal Jacket. Mon grand-père n'est pas trotskiste, pas plus que je ne suis juif ou peintre, et pourtant j'ai été ému par mon enquête sur ces "disparus" tout comme par la lecture de Primo Levi ou par une oeuvre de Duchamp. Nul homme n'est une île et tout ce qui concerne l'humanité me concerne. Ce que je transporte, ce que je m'approprie m'appartient. Là réside l'autobiographique." M. G. "Gilles Bourdos redonne corps à des fantômes surgis de l'Histoire." *L'Humanité*, 10 Février 1999, 12.

on three films in each category as it relates to the topic. In my opinion, the movies discussed are truly emblematic of the films in each grouping and interact best with the general question of French national identity. For many years, French intellectuals and writers have wrestled with questions of Jewish identity in France. The same can be said of filmmakers. While it is clearly impossible to comprehensively cover the entire corpus of film production, this book endeavors to provide an overview of features addressing the nebulous concept of "Jewish identity" and includes a Descriptive Filmography of Jewish-identity movies released between 1950 and 2010.

