

Introduction

The Long Shadow of the Jewish Question in Paris

SARA R. HOROWITZ
 AMIRA BOJADZIJA-DAN
 JULIA CREET

The memory has burst, as a balloon bursts, but we spend our time sewing it back up. . . . sewing scraps together is every writer's task, a hypothetically endless task, and impossible task. . . .

—Henri Raczymow

In Search of Shadows Past

On June 1, 2015, the city of Paris designated a broad walkway “Promenade Dora Bruder” after an almost unknown Jewish teenager who was deported in 1943 along with thousands of other Parisian Jews during the Nazi Occupation of Paris. One of many who did not return, Dora was made famous by the Nobel Prize–winning French writer Patrick Modiano years after her murder. A plaque was sunk in the cement of the 18th arrondissement, once the heart of a vibrant Parisian Jewish community. Le Réseau Modiano, a blog dedicated to interpreting Modiano's work, put it this way, “Entre un

livre majeur et une promenade à son nom, Dora Bruder ne pourra pas disparaître de sitôt des mémoires.” (“Between a major book and a promenade in her name, Dora Bruder cannot soon disappear from memory.”) Standing in front of this plaque on a spring afternoon, the editors of this book marveled at the power of literature to invoke history, memory, and melancholy in Paris, the City of Light, where Jewish life had flourished and perished in its shadows. Dora Bruder is a shadow, a literary substance, given a concrete place on the shady promenade between rue Leibniz and rue Belliard in the quarter between the Clignancourt gate and that of Saint-Ouen, beside a disused railway line turned into gardens. It’s a place of darkness and light.

Shadows in the City of Light is a collection of chapters by fourteen prominent writers and scholars that explores the significance of Paris in



Figure 1.1. Walking on the Promenade Dora Bruder. (Photograph by Julia Creet)

the writing of five influential French writers: Sarah Kofman, philosopher and memoirist; Patrick Modiano, novelist and Nobel laureate; Georges Perec, novelist; and Henri Raczymow, novelist and memoirist—each of whom published in the decades following World War II—and novelist, Irène Némirovsky, who wrote during the war, but whose manuscript about the impact of the war on Parisians was discovered and published decades later. In their writing, these authors walk their readers through streets and arrondissements that bear in powerful ways on the stories they weave, and on the issues they engage. They move their readers through a wartime or postwar cityscape of Paris, where the city functions not merely as a backdrop or setting, but as dynamic space that raises complex questions about absence, survival, ambivalence, secularity, and citizenship.

While Jewish life, culture, and thought both thrived and struggled in other parts of France, the city of Paris holds a special place in the Jewish imagination. During the tumultuous years in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Europe, Paris was a beacon and a magnet for the Jews of central and eastern Europe who flocked there, fleeing social, economic, and political hardship. Those very immigrants and their descendants were the most vulnerable of French Jews under Nazism, deported with the help of French police and bureaucrats, but also sheltered by fellow Frenchmen, in Paris and other areas of France. After the war, Jews from Poland, Russia, and elsewhere gravitated to Paris, some living there temporarily and others settling there, shaped by—and helping to reshape—the Parisian literary, cultural, and philosophical cityscape.

For the writers treated in this volume, neither their Frenchness nor their Jewishness was a fixed point. The chapters in *Shadows in the City of Light* explore the ways in which Paris functions as a fulcrum between cultures, between memory and forgetting, between history and place. The memory of places is a complicated arrangement and one hotly debated in French history.

Pierre Nora argued convincingly that commemoration turns memory into something archival, historical. Commemorative sites, he suggested, substitute for living memory—that is, memory kept alive unselfconsciously in the places where people remembered and the people remembering have always lived. But what of places where memory has been suppressed? Sites that—like “Promenade Dora Bruder”—have to be marked because local memory has tried to forget? The Paris streets remain impassive. And yet we imagine these streets as witnesses who have absorbed what happened there, and have something to impart to us if we know how to look and to listen.



Figure 1.2. A Jewish shopkeeper helps a customer in the doorway of his grocery store in the Jewish quarter in Paris, 1930s. (Source: USHMM)

We are drawn into walking and writing in these places, knowing and imagining that we are walking in the footsteps of others, as if the ground, the buildings, the courtyards absorb history and can give back to us a lost past.

But what of this physical relationship between past and present in the streets of Paris? Why do we find the concrete expression of the past so compelling? As Maxime Decout declares in his chapter on *Dora Bruder*, “Topography rather than history brings the dead back to life.” You might say that Paris is the main character of this book and our random but orchestrated intersections with her map an elusive dialogue about space, place, and Jewish memory. Jewish memory is inseparable from a history of moving from one place to another, of exile from the promised land and from adopted lands. The Jews of Paris in the books that we study in this volume are mostly from elsewhere, as Annelies Schulte Nordholt and Amira Bojadzija-Dan both

show in their contributions to this volume: from Poland, from Germany, from North Africa, contributing to the character of “the wandering Jew” and a “uniquely Jewish anxiety over space and belonging,” as Bojadzija-Dan puts it. Jews have occupied temporary spaces in many places, but few have been so compelling as Paris, at once a place of enlightenment ideals and deep disappointment. It is an “extraordinary city,” writes Thomas Nolden, “that Jews are permitted to enter and pushed to leave.”

Place is one of the great aggregators of collective memory, both figuratively and physically. The collective memories most frequently invoked in the stories that we discuss in this collection are intimate, mostly family memories and memories of family set in the streets and neighborhoods of Paris, representing the larger history of Jewish history in Paris. They are memories lodged in place that offer us a connection between private, family memory and collective tragedy (Henri Raczymow). None of us really remember alone, according to the great French sociologist of memory, Maurice Halbwachs (who died in Buchenwald after protesting the arrest of his Jewish father-in-law), and family memory is one of the most potent forms of collective memory.

All of the writers we read in this volume (save Irène Némirovsky) were children during the war, of the war, or of the immediate postwar, coming of age after the time when the destruction of their families was ordained by the state. We find in these books the “radical loneliness” of remembering alone (Wolf). The implications of these vulnerable families for our understanding of spatial memory are quite profound. French philosopher of literature Gaston Bachelard, in his 1958 book *The Poetics of Space*, looked to psychoanalysis and poetry to map the psychic and physical intimacy of our homes akin to the deepest structures of fairy tales and inscribed in our bodies. The nooks and crannies, attics and cellars, stairs and hallways of houses were the phenomenological embodiment of our dreams, articulated once again through poetry. But what of families that were dispossessed of those private spaces, those safe and nostalgic interior places? It is telling that the Paris we encounter in the stories we write about here is largely topographical, with family memory mourned in the coldness of the city streets more than drawn from the warmth of homes. Most of the narratives we read in this volume are outside stories, expelled from private domains, mapped onto the streets of Paris—only to be forgotten. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), Michel de Certeau asks us to consider walking as a “pedestrian speech act” (98). When we speak, we occupy or take on all of language and similarly, when we walk in a place, we occupy the topography

all around us. When we speak, we perform, as de Certeau puts it, an “acoustic acting-out of language,” just as when we walk—our steps performing a movement from one place to another—we perform a “spatial acting out of the place” (98). Finally, when we speak with another, we declare a relationship to our listener and walking, correspondingly, articulates a relationship between places. While walking is both a performative and rhetorical act, it also evokes absence: “To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent . . .” (103). De Certeau’s model of walking seems most salient to us as Scott Lerner observes that our writers search these empty places of Paris pursuing lost parents, a melancholic exercise that treats the topography of Paris as a metaphor for the return of repressed memories (personal and political) themselves.

Strolling along with us for the conversation about presence, absence, and literature, we imagine some of the great walkers of Paris—Charles Baudelaire’s flâneur of *Les Fleur du Mal*, Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*—as the prewar Paris intertexts that resituate postwar Jewish writing. We encounter almost immediately in its streets the German Jewish critic Walter Benjamin and his Arcades Project, started in 1927 and unfinished still in 1940, when he fled the Occupation. Strolling through the nineteenth-century Parisian shopping arcades, Benjamin’s flâneur, his walker, negotiated the fleeting presence of the past through his material encounters. By the time Benjamin embarked on his Arcades Project, many of the arcades were already memories, their physical presence having been “swallowed up” by the great reconstruction of Paris by Baron Haussmann. Benjamin’s mode of walking Paris, a combination of historical materialism with a strong dash of Jewish mysticism, became the model of the Paris Rambler who resisted the forces of production by wandering at leisure, finding in the experience of the city, the mystical instant, bringing the past into present. Benjamin’s aesthetic walker is now deeply complicated by these Jewish writers in search of memories fixed in time and place only by markers of expulsion. If anything, as Sara Horowitz argues, the Jewish movement in occupied Paris was “anti-flânerie,” not at all free to roam the city at will.

Dedicated seventy years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the concentration camp and killing center where Dora Bruder and so many others were murdered, the Promenade that bears her name joins other markers of the disappeared and dispossessed of Paris. Some of these are sites of commemoration, memorials that draw local visitors and tourists. The Mémorial des Martyrs de la Déportation (Memorial to the Martyrs of the Deportation),



Figure 1.3. Promenade Dora Bruder. (Photograph by Sara R. Horowitz)

for example, is a short walk from the majestic Notre Dame cathedral. Carved into the eastern tip of the Île de la Cité and jutting into the Seine River, it was inaugurated in 1962 to commemorate “the 200,000 French deportees sleeping in the night and the fog, exterminated in the Nazi concentration camps.” The inscription gestures toward the German phrase *Nacht und Nebel* that signals the Nazi policy of deliberate obfuscation of their genocidal aim, and toward Alain Resnais’s 1956 documentary film, *Nuit et brouillard*, which exposes Nazi atrocity and the killing centers in the east that enacted the genocide. Neither Resnais’s film nor the Deportation Memorial note the deportation and murder of Jews as a distinct category. That omission is characteristic of the conversation in France about Nazis and the Occupation that was current in the decades following World War II.

Physically absent after the war, the deported Jews were also missing in French national memory. As philosopher François Azouvi insists in his 2012 *Le Mythe du Grand Silence*, postwar acknowledgment of the genocide of the Jews of Europe found its way into journalistic reportage and intellectual exchange. Still, as the works of the writers treated in this book attest, French public discourse about the war, its victims, and the ethical implications were couched most often in universal, rather than particular,

terms—effectively effacing the specific circumstances and experiences of the disappeared French Jews. These unnoted Jewish deportees cast a shadow in the City of Light. It is their unremarked absence that drew Patrick Modiano in search of a trace of Dora Bruder, and Georges Perec in search of traces of his parents and the other disappeared Jews of the Belleville neighborhood. The recurring mapping and remapping of Paris in their writing, and in the writing of Sarah Kofman and Henri Raczymow, bring the absent past into the present, layering past and present cityscapes over one another. Thanks to their engagement with the sights, textures, and sounds of a part of Paris that is no more, the city itself remembers its past.

A Brief, Modern History of the Jews of Paris

Lebn vi got in Frankraykh—Un juif est heureux comme Dieu en France

The eighteenth century helped usher in a new era for the Jews of Europe and, particularly, of France. The French Revolution of 1789, so central to the Enlightenment project, initiated the political philosophy that led to the emancipation of the Jews—that is, extending to Jews benefits of citizenship—first in France, then in other European countries. Although it was a deeply contentious issue, the French revolutionaries who set the ideals of their movement—*liberté, égalité, fraternité*—argued in favor of according the full rights of citizenship to France’s native Jews.

The integration of Jews into the French nation emerged out of Enlightenment ideas about human and social perfectability. In a speech now famous for setting the terms by which liberal democracies would regard minorities, Count Stanislas de Clermont Tonnerre insisted that the French Republic must grant equal rights to French Jews if it was to honor its own principles of equality, secularity, and human rights. “The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals. . . . they must constitute neither a state, nor a political corps, nor an order; they must individually become citizens. . . . The existence of a nation within a nation is unacceptable to our country.” This formulation responded to fears that the Jew harbored dual loyalties and, as such, posed a danger to France. Count Clermont-Tonnerre’s language articulated a neat divide between private and public life, and between personal (that is, religious) and national identity. Religion was seen as a personal and domestic option shared with one’s

coreligionists. Citizenship was a public and collective commitment, shared with all French people.

But the laws that emancipated the Jews also threw the Jewish community into one of its many identity crises, which, according to the French historian Léon Polyakov, strikes individuals whose belonging to a particular group is questioned, or who are subject to exclusion, discrimination, or violence. For Jews, Polyakov observes, such identity crises are endemic. The emancipation put many Jews in the impossible position of having to choose between Jewishness and Frenchness. Moreover, the proponents of the emancipation, such as Abbé Grégoire, hoped that it would bring Jews, by “gentle means” to become Christians—in other words, that it would result in their disappearance as Jews. Thus pressured to abandon who they were to become something else, the Jews of France were subjected to the opposing forces of tradition and the affective pull of Jewish community life, on one side, and economic opportunity and social emancipation, on the other.

It was not until the nineteenth century that a significant Jewish population took root in Paris. From a meager population of 3,000 in 1808, by the middle of the nineteenth century Paris housed the twelfth largest Jewish population of any city in the world. And when France lost the territories of Alsace-Lorraine to Prussia in 1871, the Jews from that region gravitated in large numbers to Paris. They formed a distinct cultural group and, like the Jews who already called Paris home, they aspired to assimilate—that is, to maintain both a French and a Jewish identity.

By the nineteenth century, a Yiddish expression common in Poland and Ukraine encapsulated the eastern European image of Jewish France: *Lebn vi got in Frankraykh* (Live like God in France). Or, as rendered more expansively into French: *Un juif est heureux comme Dieu en France* (A Jew is as happy as God in France). Although the long-standing fears of the Jewish presence endured in France, in the eyes of Jews elsewhere, the rights enjoyed by French Jews as citizens of a liberal democracy made their position enviable. And for them, as for other Europeans, Paris was the symbol of France. Indeed, responding to both economic crisis and renewed waves of pogroms, some 35,000 Jews left eastern Europe for Paris between 1880 and 1914, with the number of immigrants mounting after 1905.

The pogroms in Russia left the French public puzzled. In Paris, the frenzied antisemitism of the populace in eastern Europe was, according to Polyakov, considered a “bewildering foreign mania.” As a whole, as he points out, “the French people took some time before they danced to the foreign tune, whether that of Berlin, Saint Petersburg, or Rome.” The French

Revolution swept aside the history of exploitation, plunder, persecutions, and murder of the French Jews but it didn't take long for the indigenous antisemitism to manifest itself. In spring 1886, Édouard Drumont's tract *La France juive* fostered a new climate and paved the way for the rapid spread of large-scale antisemitic propaganda. In 1890 the Catholic newspaper *La Croix* proudly proclaimed itself "the most anti-Jewish newspaper in France."

It was in this climate that the infamous Dreyfus affair hit the press. In December 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a young Jewish military officer, was falsely accused of passing along French military secrets to Germany, convicted of treason, and imprisoned on Devil's Island. Exonerating evidence soon emerged—evidence that identified the real culprit to be Major Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy. But military authorities suppressed the evidence and introduced falsified documents that further incriminated Dreyfus. As a result, in 1897, Esterhazy was acquitted and Dreyfus's conviction stood. Two years later, Dreyfus was retried. He was again convicted, although this time he was pardoned and released. Not until 1906 was Dreyfus exonerated.

For Theodore Herzl, the Dreyfus affair was proof that Jews had no real future in Europe. Notwithstanding the legal rights Jews claimed as citizens, Herzl concluded that antisemitism precluded real equality. He attended the Dreyfus trial as a journalist and saw Dreyfus being stripped of his rank, writing, "They didn't shriek 'Down with Dreyfus!' but 'Down with the Jews!'" French sociologist Emile Durkheim, who, like Dreyfus was from an Alsatian Jewish family, bitterly remarked on the "burst of joy on the boulevards instead of what should have been public mourning." French Prime Minister Léon Blum, then a young man who was also from an assimilated Alsatian Jewish family, was appalled by the "mood of the scalp dance, a ferocious joy of reprisal." The Dreyfus affair unleashed a cold civil war in France. In spite of the letters published by *Le Figaro* demonstrating Esterhazy's hatred of France and proving his guilt, and in spite of novelist Émile Zola's *J'accuse* (1898)—which accused the French government of antisemitism—the majority of the French public and its political establishment remained staunchly anti-Dreyfus. Even when new information made a review of the Dreyfus verdict inevitable, the *anti-Dreyfusard* camp did not relent. Violent incidents multiplied and as the victory of the *Dreyfusard* camp became imminent, the risk of a coup d'état and civil war grew. Polyakov points out that the social fabric in France suffered consequences that persist to this day: on one side were the conservative forces, the torch bearers of the traditional Catholic values; on the other side were the progressives, the partisans of a secular republic founded on the ideals of human rights.

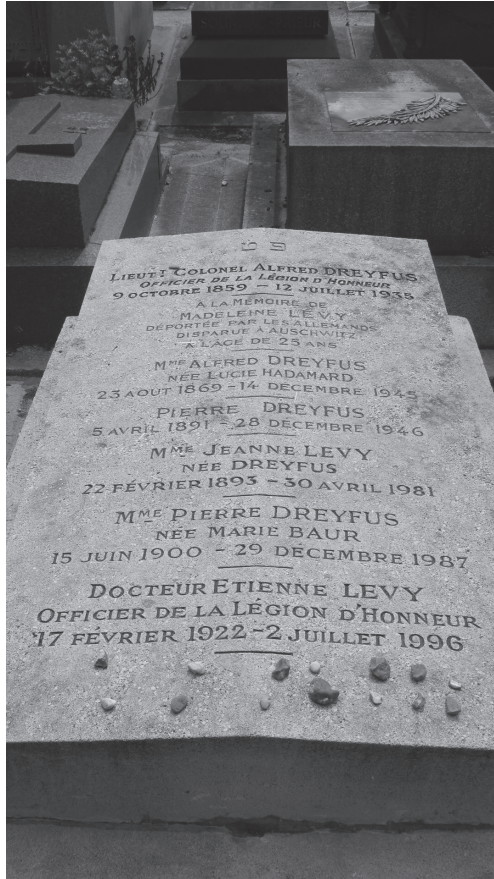


Figure 1.4. Grave of Alfred Dreyfus. (Photograph by Jonathan Richler)

Nonetheless, French immigration policies were far more liberal and welcoming of Jews than those of other Western countries. The 1905 Aliens Act of Great Britain, for example, kept the wave of Jewish immigration from the east to a trickle. France's relatively liberal policies toward Jews between the two world wars were beckoning. Jews saw France as land of equality and opportunity. Paris developed a thriving Jewish cultural life. Many foreign-born Jews enlisted in the French army and—like Alfred Dreyfus after he was exonerated—fought in World War I. At the same time, many French continued to harbor deep ambivalence towards Jews, with mounting xenophobia and antisemitism.

French Jews, too, were ambivalent about the new arrivals. In Paris, the newcomers were not warmly welcomed by the native French Jews of the city, who numbered approximately 40,000. Still, many Jewish organizations in Paris helped the eastern European immigrants to acclimate to French life. The Jewish immigrants pouring in from eastern Europe at turn of century were largely poor, Yiddish speaking, often religious, and working class, among them skilled workers and artisans. Some, however, were well-educated, secular, acculturated Jews seeking to escape the violent antisemitism of eastern Europe, and political refugees and intellectual exiles. Existing Jewish organizations offered education on Jewish culture in the French context. They provided economic assistance to the newcomers, and encouraged them to assimilate culturally and adopt French ways of being.



Figure 1.5. A view of rue des Rosiers in the Jewish quarter in Paris, 1930s. (Source: USHMM)

However, the two populations—the long-standing Jewish community and the more recent immigrants—maintained a high degree of cultural separateness. For the most part, the immigrants established and clung to their own institutions. For example, the established French synagogues felt alien to the Jews of eastern Europe, modeled as they were on French Catholic churches, so they founded their own synagogues and retained customs from home. They formed cohesive religious, cultural, social, and economic networks. They created their own newspapers, schools, philanthropic organizations, trade unions, and cultural institutions. They frequented their own theater and restaurants, and patronized their own kosher butchers. Jewish neighborhoods developed beyond the Marais—in the area of Belleville, in the 11th, 19th, and 20th arrondissements; in Montmartre, in Clignancourt. These neighborhoods figure in important ways in the works of the authors examined in this book.

The 1930s in France were marked by economic crisis and political instability. The charismatic, Jewish Léon Blum was the head of the *Parti populaire français* and president of the council (prime minister) of the leftist coalition government. Another Jewish political figure, Georges Mandel, was a minister in the same government. This decade would witness the emergence of fascist movements and xenophobic writers such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, who used his talent to promote hatred of Jews. A slew of newspapers such as *L'anti-juif*, *La Gerbe*, or *Je suis partout* were at the forefront of a campaign of hatred against Léon Blum. Patrick Modiano's first novel, *La Place de l'étoile* (1968), echoes the savage antisemitism in France during the years leading up to World War II.

Vichy France and the Paris Cultural Scene

On May 10, 1940, German forces attacked France. On June 14, Paris fell, undefended. On June 22, the capitulation of France to Germany was signed, ushering in the period known as Vichy France, or *Régime de Vichy*. On Hitler's orders, the railcar where the 1918 armistice ending World War I was signed—the ultimate humiliation of Germany in Hitler's eyes—served this time as the stage for the final act of France's defeat. As part of the armistice agreement, the country was divided into two parts. The north and the Atlantic coast of France—including Paris—were directly controlled by the Nazis and the city thus came under German military rule in collaboration with their chosen French officials. The southeastern part of the country was

governed by the French and the capital was moved from Paris to the city of Vichy, some 250 miles to the south.

The stunned Parisians witnessed Hitler's triumphant tour of the city on June 23, 1940. Soon after, on July 10, in an extraordinary session of the two chambers of representatives meeting at the theater of the Grand Casino in Vichy, President Albert Lebrun accorded General Philippe Pétain full powers to form a government and introduce a new constitution. The vote took place in the absence of 20 percent of the members of both chambers, some exiled, some dead. The majority of those present voted yes, effectively ending the Third Republic.

By the time the German army invaded France in May 1940, roughly 175,000 Jews lived in Paris—some of them long-time residents, others recent refugees from other places under Nazi control. Realizing the danger to their own status in France and intensely loyal to the French Republic, many Jews joined the French resistance. When northern and western France came under Nazi occupation, many of the Jewish inhabitants fled Paris, hoping to find haven in southern France, helped by secret Jewish organizations such as the Communist Solidarité, the Bundist Amelot, the Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants, or the Children's Aid Society (OSE), and several clandestine Zionist groups. A September 1940 German census records 150,000 Jews living in Paris, 64,000 of them designated as foreign Jews. This latter group was the first to be targeted for arrest and deportation.

In the parts of France under their direct control, Nazis instituted race laws identical to those applied in Germany. The so-called free zone, controlled by the Vichy government, had its own rules, but, according to the terms of the 1940 armistice, the Vichy government was to collaborate with Germany in the implementation of the Final Solution. With Maréchal Pétain as head of government, joined by Pierre Laval as vice president of the Council of Ministers, the government initiated a slew of measures that established antisemitism as the official state policy and Jews were excluded from social and political life. The government established a special ministry and police force for the "Jewish question" (CGQJ). Foreign Jews—50,000 persons by the end of 1940—were imprisoned in the territory under the control of the Vichy government. Later on, Vichy civil servants continued to collaborate with the occupier by giving lists of the Jewish citizens to the Gestapo and the municipal police of Paris. The Police Préfecture of Paris for example, handed in the so-called Tullard file, containing the names of all the Jews living in the Paris region.



Figure 1.6. “For one hundred years, the verminous Jew has come from his ghetto and invaded France.” One of a series of cartoons from a French language, anti-Jewish pamphlet titled, “The Canker Which Corroded France,” published by the Institute for the Study of Jewish Questions in Paris, 1940–1941. (Source: USHMM)

Between 1940 and 1941, with the help of the French police, the Germans arrested 10,000 Jews. On July 22, 1940, less than a month after it was formed, the Vichy government stripped all Jews naturalized after 1927 of their French citizenship. As a result, more than 15,000 people became stateless, and therefore further marginalized and more exposed to persecution. Then, in the fall of 1940 and in June 1941, Vichy enacted additional laws regarding the status of the foreign Jews. These new laws differentiated between Jews born in the countries under the Nazi occupation, Jews born in France, and Jews from the rest of Europe. The laws applied also to Jews living in French colonies such as Algeria. All foreign Jews were to be interned. Two additional categories of citizens subject to these laws were communists

and Freemasons. So proactive were the antisemitic measures of the Vichy government that by early 1943, the head of Pétain's civil cabinet boasted that France outdid the rest of Europe, rivaling Germany in its persecution of Jews.

Between July 1940 and November 1942, when the Germans invaded the free zone in response to the landing of the Allied troops in Tunis and Algeria, the pressure of the race laws made life untenable. Starting in 1940, Jews could no longer be civil servants, soldiers, teachers, or journalists; in 1941 the list of proscribed professions expanded even further. Jews were excluded from the census, and they were limited in the practice of medicine and dentistry. From June 1942, Jews could no longer be artists.

The arrival of the German army also gave rise to an eruption of reactionary forces in France: the puritanism that characterized Vichy merged with the antisemitism and anti-Modernism that had marked French public discourse in the late 1930s. Prominent writers such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Drieu La Rochelle, and Robert Brasillach openly welcomed the Nazis. Cries against the moral corruption, perversion, and decadence spread by modern art, and the need for it to reform itself, came from even the most respected daily newspapers such as *Le Temps* and *Le Figaro*. Céline, Drieu La Rochelle, Brasillach, and figures such as Alain Laubreaux, the theater critic of the fascist weekly *Je suis partout*, served as models for the characters of Patrick Modiano's *The Occupation Trilogy*, only recently translated into English.

When the Germans marched into Paris in the spring of 1940, it was not only France that lost; according to Frederic Spotts, what followed was a unique historical phenomenon in which a genuine "cultural International" composed of writers, painters, sculptors, composers and musicians, filmmakers and art collectors, both French and foreign, was irreparably shattered. He describes it as follows:

Twentieth-century Paris was to culture what nineteenth-century England had been to industry. Paris had fostered Impressionism and post-Impressionism, Cubism, Fauvism, and Symbolism as well as Dadaism, Futurism, Purism, Realism and Vorticism, not to mention Existentialism, Neo-Plasticism, Orphism, Pointillism, Simultanism, Surrealism and Transhylism. It enjoyed what seemed to be a predestined superiority, taking for granted that the best art was made in Paris and would go on being made there for evermore. (Spotts, 167)

By the time of the armistice, this unique community of intellectuals and artists was scattered across France and beyond.

Most foreigners, Spotts points out, had already fled Paris ahead of the advancing German forces: Nabokov was on his way to the United States, Walter Benjamin was in a transit camp near Nevers, and Max Ernst was in an internment camp near Nîmes. Many others also left Paris: Picasso, Matisse, Duchamp, Dalí, Chagall, Kandinsky, Sonia Delauney, Magritte, Léger, philosopher Henri Bergson, and Simone de Beauvoir were spread across the south of France in search of shelter and a source of income. Writers such as Malraux, Sartre, Jeanson, Desnos, and Anouilh, were all made prisoners of war. Irène Némirovsky's *Suite Française* captures the full extent of the chaos among Parisians, and her own life is a poignant example of the horrors that befell the Jews of France.

Some cultural figures remained in Paris, especially those of an older generation. Some were opportunists who hoped to take advantage of the Occupation for their personal gain. For French intellectuals, the decision to stay or leave Paris presented itself as a moral dilemma. For the foreigners, many of whom also happened to be Jewish, leaving, if possible, represented the only possibility for survival. Chagall nearly did not make it: in April 1941 he was picked up in a surprise roundup of Jews and was saved by the urgent intervention of the American Emergency Rescue Committee.

A few days after the armistice Albert Camus wrote, "Life in France is hell for the mind now." This, however, did not prevent him from getting married and moving to Paris from Algiers, then publishing *L'Étranger* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in 1942. Sartre, who also worked and published during the Occupation, is still the subject of much debate. According to Ingrid Galster, Sartre was "neither saint nor criminal. He was neither a pure resistant, nor a collaborator. . . . During the occupation he did not want to renounce his vocation of a writer . . . even though, to support himself, he took the job of a Jewish professor who was fired by the Vichy government." The response of French artists and intellectuals to the Occupation, remains, to this day, subject of discussion and a matter of controversy: Was staying on and continuing to work equal to collaboration with the enemy? Was it courageous or cowardly? What about the *attentistes*, the ones who thought the best thing to do was wait and see? In the words of Alan Riding, France is still trying to answer the question, "where did accommodation leave off and collaboration begin?"

In 1942, these efforts were stepped up as Germans began systematically rounding up and deporting foreign Jews from Paris to transit camps in Drancy, Pithiviers, and Beaune-la-Rolande. In mid-July 1942, 13,000 Parisian Jews were rounded up and confined to the Vélodrome d'Hiver, or Vél d'Hiv, a sports arena in the southern part of the city. This was the largest

roundup of Jews in France. There they were confined under abysmal conditions, without food or water, with poor sanitation and no ventilation. After several days, the Jews were deported to the internment and transit camp in Drancy, a northeastern suburb of Paris. The camp was initially staffed by French police and while they were there, the Jews were held in buildings that had once served as police barracks. From Drancy, they were sent on to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Between August 1941 and August 1944, approximately 70,000 people passed through Drancy en route to the concentration camps and killing centers in the East. Most of the deportees were Jews, along with about 5,000 or 6,000 non-Jews who were active in the French resistance. One-third of Jews deported from Drancy were French citizens. Of those interned in Drancy, fewer than 2,000 survived the war.

By the middle of 1943, about 60,000 Jews remained in Paris. The Germans began to deport Jews from orphanages, hospitals, and nursing homes. Then, early in 1944, they concentrated on arresting and deporting all Jewish French citizens. On August 25, 1944, Allied forces liberated Paris. In all, more than 50,000 Parisian Jews, mostly foreign-born, had been deported and murdered. Nonetheless, antisemitism had always been



Figure 1.7. Foreign-born Jews arrive at the Gare d'Austerlitz station during a deportation action from Paris, 1941. (Source: USHMM)

rejected by a part of the French people that included progressive women and men of all walks of life: Émile Zola and Georges Clemenceau, the leading *Dreyfusards*; members of the resistance; and the approximately 4,000 people who helped rescue Jews and were later honored by the Israeli government with the designation “Righteous among the Nations.” Also included in this group were courageous members of the Catholic clergy who were involved in hiding the Jews of France and helping them to escape. This, together with the fact that many people managed to hide or escape on their own, explains how more than three-quarters of French Jews survived World War II.

The Authors and Their Contexts: The Paris of the Postwar Literature

Because he was a Jew, my father died in Auschwitz. How can it not be said?

—Sara Kofman

. . . the Paris of the occupation was always a kind of primordial darkness. . . .

—Patrick Modiano

In the aftermath of the war, Paris, along with the rest of France, reluctantly confronted questions of occupation, resistance, and collaboration. But the Jewish question—the deported Jews of Paris who never returned, the deep antisemitism in Nazi ideology, and, more specifically, French responsibility for Jewish deaths, deportations, and suffering—was excluded from the national conversation about the war for more than two decades. After World War II, many European intellectuals found themselves in exile in Paris, making the city the postwar center for European intellectual life. As historian Tony Judt declared in *Postwar*, “Paris was the capital of Europe.” In universities and cafés, the Paris intellectuals talked about evil, suffering, and atrocity without accounting for the yellow star or the moral compromises of the Vichy government. Jewish deportations were swept into the broader discussions of deportations under Nazism. The Nazi genocidal actions against Jews, and French participation in those actions, were not part of a public conversation. Judt acerbically observes that “the narcissistic

self-importance of Paris within France was projected un-self-critically onto the world at large.”

Beginning in the late 1960s, Jewish writers and intellectuals in Paris began to push for a reconsideration of French wartime behavior and a more explicit record of the fate of Jews in France under Nazi occupation and under the Vichy government. Many of these writers were born during or after the war, often into immigrant families. Some identified strongly as Jews, others acknowledged Jewish ancestry but regarded their own identity as ambiguous. They looked back at the war and its aftereffects partly to account for past events, and partly to understand themselves and the deep currents that stirred inside them. As novelist Patrick Modiano noted in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, “Like everyone else born in 1945, I was a child of the war and more precisely, because I was born in Paris, a child who owed his birth to the Paris of the occupation. . . .” He noted the silence of those around him who had been adults during the Occupation of Paris. In a sense, one might say he speaks for all the writers treated in this volume when he says, “[W]hen their children asked them questions about that period and that Paris, their answers were evasive. Or else they remained silent as if they wanted to rub out those dark years from their memory and keep something hidden from us. But faced with the silence of our parents we worked it all out as if we had lived it ourselves.”

This volume considers five Paris writers who, like Modiano, grappled with the effects or the aftermath of the Nazi occupation, and its imprint on their own lives and on their Paris. The chapters that follow explore the significance of Paris in the postwar writing of Sarah Kofman, Patrick Modiano, Georges Perec, and Henri Raczymow—each of whom published in the decades following World War II. Although Irène Némirovsky did not survive the war, her novel, discovered and published much later, describes the impact of the war on Parisians with the immediacy that only her tragic proximity to those events could afford. Paris was the topography of memory, recording the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish and French identity, on literature and literary forms, on adaptation, identity, displacement, belonging, and haunting.

Sarah Kofman (1934–1994) was a prominent philosopher interested in psychoanalytic approaches to art, film, and literature. Her parents were Orthodox Jews who had come to Paris from Poland in 1929. Her father, Berek Kofman, the rabbi of a Paris synagogue, was among the 13,000 Jews arrested in the Vel d’Hiv’ Roundup; he had refused to go into hiding in the hope that his capture would buy his family time to hide. He was deported