

**[Document Title]**

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# The Changing Image of the Holocaust as Portrayed in French Cinema

## Introduction

The way the world, or a specific country, "remembers" an event has less to do with recounting the actual story verbatim and often more to do with the politics of that particular region or time period. Politics, art, survivors or participants and museums themselves will all influence how the narrative takes shape.

The Holocaust, in particular, has had its narrative twisted and misconstrued in ways to serve particular countries or specific regions. In America, for example, the Holocaust is largely molded into a narrative that helps its audience relate to it. Daniel Lévy and Natan Sznaider discuss how the Holocaust's narrative changes and adapts over time in their work *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*. They state, quoting Michael Berenbaum: "[American] museums' story of the Holocaust will have to be 'told in such a way that it would resonate not only with the survivor in New York and his children in Houston or San Francisco, but with the black leader from Atlanta, midwestern farmer, or a northeastern industrialist.'"<sup>1</sup>

This sort of memory "reworking" is not unique to America; it is present all over the world, especially in countries where the Holocaust took place. The narrative is often changed in order to appease the public who would either like to be silent or vocal, or to protect those culpable people in influential roles who were never put to justice. As art is a particularly powerful medium, film and theatre are often used to "explore," commemorate or discuss the Holocaust. Because of their accessibility in modern society, these forms of narrative are sometimes used to replace other ways in which the "story" can be told, contributing excessively to the national memory. This can, in turn, make nations feel more or less culpable, and believe or disprove certain stereotypes about life during that era.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Lévy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Temple: Philadelphia, 2006) 153.

The following thesis will examine France's role in the Holocaust and how films they have produced reflect and change the French public's perception of their own participation in the Holocaust and how they have taken ownership over their role. Five Semiotically French films on the Holocaust have been chosen for this project: *Nuit et Brouillard (Night and Fog)*, *La Chagrin et la Pitié (Sorrow and the Pity)*, *Au Revoir les Enfants (Goodbye Children)*, *Elle s'appelait Sarah (Sarah's Key)* and *La Rafle (The Round Up)*. These five films will be analyzed in regard to their content (such as reality versus fiction, how content and portrayal of French characters have changed over time and how each film fits or does not fit into the archetypes of Holocaust cinema), style, critical reception and public reception in both France and abroad. The first two chapters will serve as introductions and framework; the first chapter discussing the Holocaust and its overrepresentation in film and the second focusing on France's complicated role in the Holocaust itself. The last three chapters will summarily discuss the portrayal of the issues of collaboration and resistance in regard to the French Holocaust in film produced in France, as well as the portrayal of the horrific Vél d'Hiv round up in French film. The thesis will explore how film has shaped the way the French public sees itself. Additionally, it will discuss the ways in which French government has gone to great lengths to protect the French populace from films depicting the Holocaust and its reasons for doing so. Secondly, this thesis will discuss how French public schools, the French Ministry of Education, French memorials/museums and French companies have help shape the public narrative and its evolution from 1945 to present day.

## Chapter One: The Holocaust in Cinema

Since its inception, film has changed the way we relate to history and ourselves. While the ability to access film was once dependent on class and the luxury of having free time and disposable income available to attend a screening, today films are pervasive in "first world" cultures. Attending movies in a cinema is still a very popular activity, but it is no longer necessary to physically go to a theater in order to enjoy a film. With the advent of the VCR, followed by the DVD player and the accessibility of the Internet, the general public can watch films often without paying for them or without having to carve out an entire evening or afternoon to enjoy them. Thus, films have begun to not only permeate our daily lives, but have inundated us with ideas and thoughts we otherwise may not have been exposed to previously.

For better or worse, film confronts a myriad of stories and events, real and imagined, that represent the triumph, and defeat of the human spirit. Robert Rosenstone states, "A century after the invention of motion pictures, the visual media have become arguably the chief carrier of the historical message in our culture."<sup>2</sup> The genre of Holocaust films has always lurked in the shadows, but did not become an entire genre in itself until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when perhaps the public was ready to face its history. Holocaust films have gradually evolved from the happy-go-lucky, leave-the-audience-with-a-good feeling 1959 version of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, in which her entire ordeal at Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen was omitted, to much more graphic films such as Tim Blake Nelson's 2001 film, *The Grey Zone*.<sup>3</sup> The latter film not only asks the audience to think about the grey zone of morality within the framework of a genocide, but also tells the story of one of the last *Sonderkommando* units. Within the context of the Holocaust, the *Sonderkommando*, translated to "special unit," were male predominately Jewish

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<sup>2</sup> Paul B. Weinstein, "Movies as the Gateway to History: History and Film Project" *The History Teacher*. Nov 2001. 27-48.

<sup>3</sup> *The Grey Zone*. Dir. Tim Blake Nelson. Perf. David Arquette, Mira Sorvino, Steve Buscemi. Lionsgate, 2001.

prisoners specifically trained to unload corpses after their untimely demise in the gas chambers, followed by acting as almost accomplices to the Nazis by then doing away with the evidence, which involved burning the bodies and grinding up the bones. This work was done in exchange for better living conditions and greater portions of food, but there was always a threat that the SS would decide to bring in a new group of men for this work detail and annihilate the group before it.<sup>4</sup> On the opposite end of the spectrum from the family friendly *Diary of Anne Frank*, Nelson's film leaves no holds barred and spares the audience no visual gruesomeness which the actual *Sonderkommando* units dealt with day in and day out. This evolution speaks to the fact that the audience is both more ready to deal with such monstrosities and society has come to allow more violence as acceptable in film. However, it can be debated that such a monstrosity in film is still "too soon." The film received positive critical responses (a four out of four star rating from acclaimed film critic Roger Ebert)<sup>5</sup>, but did poorly at the box office.<sup>6</sup> Film "buffs" were ready, but perhaps it was still too much for the general audience.

#### *Anne Frank's Evolution in Film*

The depiction of Anne Frank has evolved as well, in a way that informs and represents the change in both Holocaust scholarship and Holocaust cinema. Almost sixty years after the Millie Perkins version of *The Diary of Anne Frank*<sup>7</sup>, which garnered several Oscars for its portrayal of Anne Frank as an almost clean-cut American girl (despite her German-Jewish heritage), Hollywood re-confronted Anne's life in a much more brash manner, suggesting at that time the public might indeed have been ready to face what happened to Anne after she left The Secret

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<sup>4</sup> Shlomo Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers: Eight Months in the Sonderkommando of Auschwitz* (Polity: Cambridge, 2004) 63-64.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Ebert, "The Grey Zone" *Chicago Sun-Times*. 25 Oct 2002. 27 May 2012. <<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20021025/REVIEWS/210250307/1023>>

<sup>6</sup> "Box Office for *The Grey Zone*" *Internet Movie Database*. Amazon.com Media. n.d. 27 May 2012. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0252480/business>>

<sup>7</sup> *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Dir. George Stevens. Perf. Millie Perkins, Shelley Winters, Ed Wynn. Twentieth Century Fox, 1959.

Annex. The 1959 version of Anne's diary, like the play the script was taken from, was generally well received<sup>8</sup>, but introduced some of the same issues that many scholars saw with the diary in general. Christopher Bigsby writes (in his essay, "Anne Frank: Everybody's Heroine"):

For many, [Anne Frank's] account would contribute the most affecting and accessible approach to the Holocaust. For others, it would offer a misleading source of sentimentality, not because it failed to tell a deeply moving story of someone at the beginning of her life, unaware that there would be no tomorrow, but because it enabled the reader to celebrate her life precisely because we were spared the appalling squalor, pain and despair she would come to know and which linked hers with the fate of others who were not allowed the period of remission granted to her, being sped to their deaths without even a temporary respite.<sup>9</sup>

Disney and ABC joined forces to remedy this issue by creating a narrative titled *Anne Frank: The Whole Story* starring well-known actor (and a staple of Holocaust films) Ben Kingsley. In 2001, the four-hour film was shown on ABC in the United States, and subsequently released in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Israel. Although the filmmakers did not receive permission from the Anne Frank Foundation to use actual quotes from the diary, the movie still received critical acclaim, receiving five prestigious awards, including an Emmy for the Best Mini-Series of 2001, and a Screen Actors' Guild Award for Ben Kingsley's portrayal of Otto Frank.<sup>10</sup> *Anne Frank: The Whole Story*, compiled interviews from Auschwitz and Belsen survivors in order to chronicle Anne's last days, which may have changed her earlier documented opinion that people, indeed, are good at heart. While the film makes no supposition for the audience, it leaves us with an image of a broken Otto Frank leafing through the pages of his daughter's diary in the Secret Annex, the ghosts of his family almost palpable as white subtitles inform the audience what

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Bigsby, *Remembering and Imagining the Holocaust: The Chain of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2006) 230.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>10</sup> "Anne Frank: The Whole Story." *Internet Movie Database*. Amazon.com Media. n.d. 4 April 2012. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0246430/>>

happened to the others in hiding.<sup>11</sup> In 1959, would people have been ready for this sort of ending, one that doesn't assure us that the "good guys" beat "the bad guys"?

While the 1959 version makes no claim that Anne survived, the ending lines still give the audience a sense of hope that things "aren't that bad" and that although Anne did not live, the triumph of her spirit continued. The last lines of the film, as the last lines of the Broadway play, echo an entry in Anne's actual diary dated the 15th of July 1944.

I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart. I simply can't build my hopes on a foundation of confusion, misery and death. I hear the approaching thunder that one day, will destroy us too. I feel the suffering of millions. At yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that this cruelty too shall end, and that peace and tranquility will return once again.<sup>12</sup>

The 1959 version features a voiceover of Millie Perkins playing Anne Frank, uttering simply the first line of the quote as Otto reads her diary in The Secret Annex after her death. Otto then chastises himself for not being as hopeful and believing people as much as his daughter was able to after his ordeal as a concentration camp inmate. Curiously, the film omits her discussion of the "roaring thunder," and the foreshadowing in the book that the war will destroy her.<sup>13</sup>

The 2001 version's last shot of Anne alive is not her being ushered away by the Gestapo with a cheery quip about life echoing in the distance, but instead shows her as a Belsen inmate. After finding another member of The Secret Annex, Mrs. van Pels, among the inmates, Anne and Margot learn of their mother's death in Auschwitz and gradually Anne becomes more and more depressed. Delirious with typhus and bitten raw with fleas, Anne clutches her sister Margot, who has succumbed to the same illness. Hannah Taylor-Gordon, the British teen who portrayed Anne in the film, feverishly states that she has no family left to live for,

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<sup>11</sup> *Anne Frank: The Whole Story*. Dir. Robert Dornhelm. Perf. Ben Kingsley, Hannah Taylor-Gordon, Lili Taylor. American Broadcasting Company, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Frank, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Random: New York, 2010) Kindle eBook edition.

<sup>13</sup> *The Diary of Anne Frank*.



erroneously believing her father has also perished. As the audience leaves Anne for the last time, she looks up at the camera as it pans upward on the cesspool Belsen had become by 1945, symbolizing her upcoming demise<sup>14</sup>. After seeing Anne depicted in such a manner, an audience may deduce that had she been able to continue her diary in Belsen, at the time of her death, she may not have actually penned a line about how people are still "good at heart." Like the character of Otto Frank, she may have, indeed, become jaded by her experiences. Perhaps as generations become farther and farther removed from the events, facing the full magnitude of Holocaust becomes easier. While talk of accountability is always changing and shifting in a post-Holocaust world, many facilitating the discussions today were not yet born during the era, which may account for the ability to face it more directly than their ancestors.

#### *Issues with the Portrayal of the Holocaust in Film*

In Act 3, Scene 2 of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare penned a line that is oft quoted by theater and filmmakers.

Hamlet:

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for any things so o'er done is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both hath the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.<sup>15</sup>

The idea that art holds a mirror up to nature, or society at large, is ever present in theater and film theory. While this may be true, it is also the case that film and theater are produced at a massive scale in order to earn money. Thus, the mirror held up to nature is not always the most accurate, but instead shows society (or the country in which the film or play is to be released) what it is ready to see. A mirror held up to society that produces an ugly reflection that one is not prepared to see

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<sup>14</sup> *Anne Frank: The Whole Story*.

<sup>15</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Penguin: New York, 2009) Kindle eBook Edition.

will not be popular, and therefore will not be confronted. As a result, as the images of the Holocaust become more and more realistic and graphic, it suggests that as time marches on, the audience is more prepared to gaze into the mirror without denouncing what stares back at them. East German Film Professor Frank Stern stated in his lecture at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

And that is where we are fifty years after everything, maybe only on the screen, in the movies, but maybe in real life as well. Cinema is always the mind's eye seeing beyond the mirrors of reality. It might force an encounter with a painful past; it might serve a redemptive function; it might trivialize; it might deconstruct stereotypes. But through cinema, no matter what its purpose, we start to swim again. We face the past.<sup>16</sup>

Because the Holocaust occurred at a time in which the medium of film had already been invented, the industry was quick to begin churning out stories about the Holocaust. In 1946, acclaimed director Orson Welles produced *The Stranger*, the first known feature film to include footage of a concentration camp.<sup>17</sup> *The Stranger*, while not dealing with the Holocaust directly (the film's plot centers around a Nazi fugitive), the box office success of the film demonstrated that even a year after the liberation of the camps, the world was fascinated with this sort of struggle of "good over evil," as the Holocaust has come to represent. Only a handful of films centered around the Holocaust would be produced in the 1940s and 1950s: five narrative films, or films based on real or fictional events acted out by a group of actors, in each decade and nine documentaries in the 1940s and one in the 1950s,<sup>18</sup> and as time passed, the number of films would gradually increase. The 1980s saw 32 narrative films and 24 documentaries, while the 1990s marked a landslide of Holocaust films with 70 documentaries and 50 narratives produced, respectively. The 2000-2012

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<sup>16</sup> Frank Stern, "Facing the Past: Representations of the Holocaust in German Cinema Since 1945" United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Washington, DC. 14 June 2000.

<sup>17</sup> "The Stranger" *Internet Movie Database*. Amazon.com Media. n.d. 4 April 2012. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0038991/>>

<sup>18</sup> "Films About the Holocaust" *Internet Movie Database*. Amazon.com Media. n.d. 4 April 2012. <<http://www.imdb.com/keyword/holocaust/>>

period ushered in 47 narrative films and 50 documentaries.<sup>19</sup> From relative silence came a seeming need to discuss the past over and over again, inundating a receptive audience with stories of Jews and their struggles for survival some 40 or 50 years earlier.

Scholars and film critics have questioned Hollywood's more recent fascination with the topic, claiming that the public may have grown tired of the topic. However, Meyer Gottlieb (a survivor of the Holocaust himself), president of Samuel Goldwyn films stated to a gather at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in a 2010 response to the notion of "Holocaust Fatigue," "The Holocaust has 6 million compelling stories and Hollywood is always desperate for a good story. It is only the media that think the public is tired of the subject."<sup>20</sup> Within the same article, film scholar Howard Suber states that Holocaust films are so successful because they all represent variations on the same storyline: a person trapped in a life-or-death struggle while the audience sits captivated, wondering whether or not the lead character or characters will survive.<sup>21</sup>

The book *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* by Annette Insdorf further expands on the notion that the Holocaust is so popular in current film because the very nature of it instantly makes a story filled with tension and violence, both of which are commercially appealing. Insdorf argues that the films that are largely produced are done so not because of any artistic or historical merit, but are done so only because they have fallen into the hands of those who have access to media. The stories that Insdorf feels are chosen for production are done so only because they stand a chance to create a box-office success. Therefore, Insdorf feels that the images of the Holocaust are less authentic and are becoming less pure as time goes on as the formula of the Holocaust has proven to be a monetary success. She states:

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>20</sup> "The Power of the Holocaust and Film: An Evening with Ralph Fiennes and Bob Woodward: Museum Director Sara Bloomfield's Remarks" *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. 2010. 4 April 2012.

<<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/fiennes/>>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

The only versions of Nazi persecution that we see in film are the few that have made it to the screen, and often this is less a question of choice, quality or logic than of chance: the commercial exigencies of film make it a dubious form for communicating the truth of World War II, given box-office dependence on sex, violence a simple plot, easy laughs and so on. Nevertheless, it is primarily through motion pictures that the mass audience knows--and will continue to learn--about the Nazi era and its victims.<sup>22</sup>

It can be also argued that the reason Holocaust films have become so popular is partly due to the readiness of the audience to receive them. Even in 1946, an audience would have been receptive to a story of a human being in peril, however, it was not until several decades later that the notion of the Holocaust in film became popular, much less popular enough to create an entire subgenre. A film produced that an audience is not yet ready to receive will not create the end goal: recognition, awards and money from the box-office. Therefore, it can be argued that timing has been essential to the genre of Holocaust films and the contents of the films more so reflect the feelings of the audience and their receptiveness to Holocaust content.

The readiness of an audience to accept its past, however, does not mean that the subgenre of the Holocaust is not without its issues. Many historians fear that this delicate historical period is now put into the hands of those less responsible, who will exploit the Holocaust to earn either money or acclaim. Indeed, the fact that an entire subgenre has arisen, complete with a weak and scared Jew running from the powerful SS officers, speaks volumes about the way the Holocaust is received in public memory today. While the feeling of removal may allow for people to become receptive to the stories without an overwhelming amount of guilt or placing the blame elsewhere, there a danger of the Holocaust becoming simply a tale of good versus evil; as though the Holocaust is a morality fable instead of an actual historical event. Because of it has crept so far into public awareness and discourse, the general viewer may come to see Nazis as "pure evil," and cease to see the grey zone surrounding the event, or identify with the perpetrators. Additionally, scholars have

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<sup>22</sup> Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2002) Kindle eBook Edition.

pointed repeatedly to the issue of the mass audience's inability to distinguish fact from artistic fiction. Many of these issues were addressed in a 1994 symposium on the Holocaust and film recorded in *The Village Voice* after the release of the landmark *Schindler's List*. The film was so popular, that it became a springboard debates about film and the Holocaust surfaced in non-academic papers and has since become synonymous with the term "Holocaust in Film." To date, the film has earned over \$317 million worldwide.<sup>23</sup> Tellingly, a quote by Disney Film Studio's Jeffrey Katzenberg was used to begin the chapter, discussing how *Schindler's List* had already become a morality tale:

It [*Schindler's List*] will affect how people on this planet think and act. At a moment in time it will remind us of the dark side, and do it in a way which, whenever that little green monster is lurking somewhere, this movie is going to press it down again. I don't want to burden this movie too much, but I think it will bring peace on earth and goodwill to men. Enough of the right people will see it that it will actually set the course of world affairs. Steven [Spielberg] is a national treasure.<sup>24</sup>

Undoubtedly, this reflection relegates the Nazis to "little green monsters" and others, to whom the world is not able to relate. The Nazis are "pure evil," not ordinary individuals, and certainly different from the moviegoer. Katzenberg, indeed, sees this film as not only a landmark cinematic piece, but feels that this movie alone will be able to cure the world of its ills. Unfortunately, almost twenty years after its release, it has not yet been able to do so.

Katzenberg also indirectly highlights the issue of people not being able to tell the difference between fact and fiction when it comes to Holocaust films. Katzenberg suggests the bizarre notion that simply looking at the film will change the course of human behavior, but does not discuss the idea of studying the Holocaust in its entirety. Indeed, the idea that the general audience member may be unable to distinguish between reality and film is a genuine concern of many Holocaust

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<sup>23</sup> "Box office for Schindler's List." *Internet Movie Database*. Amazon.com Media. n.d. 9 June 2012.

<sup>24</sup> "Schindler's List: Myth, Movie and Memory." *The Village Voice*: 24-31. 29 March 1994. 4 April 2012.

scholars. Within the same symposium, Art Spiegelman, a cartoonist and author/illustrator of the Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel, *Maus*, about his father's survival in Auschwitz and subsequent life afterward, stated that people like Katzenberg live so close to the cinema screen that they often confuse it with reality. Additionally, Wanda Bershen, a consultant for documentary films, expanded on Spiegelman's notion within the symposium:

I was struck with how so many leading film critics are totally fudging the difference between a dramatic movie, which is a representation, and historical reality. One of the few places it came up was in Philip Gourevitch's *Commentary* piece, where he finally, toward the end says, "Oh, there's a difference." I'm wondering, why this insistence upon making this movie into something real, rather than one representation, one powerful moment, as in the exhibit here at the museum? What's going on here? My concern is that the critics' chorus will make it almost impossible for the general audience to make that distinction themselves.<sup>25</sup>

Film scholar Amir Ameri states that film itself is so popular because of its close approximation to reality. While filmmakers are assuming their audiences will distinguish between fact and fiction, it is not necessarily the case that this happens. He states, "It is not cinema that may be confused with reality; rather it is reality that may be confused with cinema to reality's detriment."<sup>26</sup> Frank Stern further elaborates on this issue in his speech at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, stating:

Holocaust films are replete with references, visual quotes, back- and foreshadowing of images that haunt our imaginations. Before the audience can analyze and discuss such films, these "cinematic memories" are already freely crossing borders in a virtual cinematic world. As images, they subtly construct our visual memory. In the future, the memory of the Holocaust will be defined less by the recollections of the survivors than by the representations of the filmmakers. This is even happening to some

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Amir Ameri, *Imagining the Space and Place of the Imaginary* University of Denver, 2011.

extent today. With distance, in time the virtual becomes increasingly the real.<sup>27</sup>

While this problem is certainly a realistic concern, does this diminish from the work that does go in to a responsible filmmaker's process? *Anne Frank: The Whole Story*, specifically states before the film that the movie is based on extensive research and interviews by writer Kirk Ellis, in addition to further research into Anne's diary by Melissa Mueller.<sup>28</sup> It is clear from watching the film that the movie was not put together carelessly. Likewise, Tim Blake Nelson spent endless hours combing through the biography of Dr. Miklos Nyiszli, assistant to Dr. Mengele in Auschwitz, and leafing through diary entries from actual Sonderkommando units, which are kept in Auschwitz Museum's archives.<sup>29</sup> While the methods writers and directors undertake in order to make their films more authentic may not be the same methods historians use in their work, but as long as the end result is a well-researched and authentic film, they have succeeded in their goal. Movies that are thrown together without historical merit in order to make money are hopefully recognized by the audience as historical fiction.

In fact, the Holocaust has become such a subgenre of its own, complete with Jews in coats and sweaters during all months of the year (even when the event in question occurred in the summer) and speaking in false Yiddish accents, even if the events feature very assimilated Jews. The scholar Terrence Des Pres has observed that there are three basic "commandments" within the Holocaust subgenre. He describes these in his essay "Holocaust Laughter?" of the anthology *Writing and the Holocaust*:

1. The Holocaust shall be represented, in its totality, as a unique event, as a special case and kingdom of its own, above or below or apart from history.

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<sup>27</sup> Frank Stern, "Facing the Past: Representations of the Holocaust in German Cinema Since 1945" United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Washington, DC. 14 June 2000.

<sup>28</sup> *Anne Frank: The Whole Story*.

<sup>29</sup> Tim Blake Nelson. *The Grey Zone: Director's Notes and Screenplay* (New Market: New York, 2003).

2. Representations of the Holocaust shall be as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason--artistic reasons included.

3. The Holocaust shall be approached as a solemn or even a sacred event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonor its dead.<sup>30</sup>

The story of the Holocaust has, in some ways, been passed on to Hollywood, which has taken on the responsibility of transmitting this tale to subsequent generations. The force of Hollywood's hand in film is so strong that even actors such as Ben Kingsley and Ralph Fiennes, who have each starred in three landmark Holocaust films, have become almost as respected as historians when it comes to transmitting these stories. While both men have studied the Holocaust extensively in preparation for their roles, they are not historians. Kingsley describes his process of playing Otto Frank in *Anne Frank: The Whole Story* as studying only about Otto Frank and trying to authenticate the special bond Anne and her father shared with Hannah Taylor-Gordon, the teenage actress who portrayed his daughter, not the Holocaust as an event.<sup>31</sup> While no doubt his methods help him give powerful performances, he is still not a Holocaust historian. However, despite this fact, both men have been invited to speak at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and an interview with Ben Kingsley, conducted in 2011, was broadcast on National Public Radio.

During his interview on NPR, Kingsley likens his role as an actor to a tribal storyteller, sitting around a fire telling his tribesmen mythology and stories about life. He says, "And all great mythology that we love and respect has included loss and

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<sup>30</sup> Terrence Des Pres, "Holocaust Laughter?" *Writing and the Holocaust* Ed. Berel Lang. (Homes and Meier: Teaneck, 1989).

<sup>31</sup> "Ben Kingsley on Portraying Holocaust History." *National Public Radio*. 19 March 2011. Web. 5 April 2012. <<http://www.npr.org/2011/03/19/134682388/Ben-Kingsley-On-Portraying-Holocaust-History>>



tragedy, as well as great moments of salvation. It's braided in."<sup>32</sup> While this is true of mythology, and indeed most Holocaust film, theater and literature, this sort of statement automatically deduces the Holocaust to that of a myth, something dramatically untouchable and so above us; creating almost a sacred aura around it. Oddly enough, even though Kingsley likens the Holocaust to mythology, his three characters (Otto Frank in *Anne Frank: the Whole Story*, Itzhak Stern in *Schindler's List* and Simon Wiesenthal in *Murderers Among Us*) in Holocaust films are all based on real people, all of whom survived the Holocaust against great odds and amidst great loss. Kingsley ends his interview, continuing in the theme of an actor as a tribesman around a bonfire stating, "And through knowing each other and holding onto that tribal bonfire, we'll be OK."<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Kingsley perpetuates the theme of the Holocaust as myth. As generations become further and further removed, ready to receive the stories and void of accountability and guilt that their parents or grandparents may have felt when confronted with such stories, the Holocaust can now be looked on as a terrible event, almost akin to a Greek tragedy. It becomes an allegory for evil, and thus the audience believes that simply telling and retelling the story will somehow heal a broken society, warning us against evil instead of challenging the audience to think critically about the roots of such an event. It becomes so black and white, something so far removed from the daily life of a "regular" movie-goer that the very idea of being faced with such a situation, indeed, feels like a myth.

This idea is perpetuated by people like Jeffrey Katzenberg who in the *Village Voice* article referred to Nazis as "little green monsters."<sup>34</sup> Additionally, many Holocaust films try to identify all Jews as religious, which is not necessarily the case, giving people who have no knowledge of Judaism a little taste of it via the film, even if it is not necessarily accurate. This creates not only an image of a myth, but creates the

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> "Schindler's List: Myth, Movie and Memory." *The Village Voice*: 24-31. 29 March 1994. 4 April 2012.

Nazis and the Jews as larger than life, mythical beings that are not necessarily relatable to the audience. Philip Gourevitch points out such issues by stating, in the same *Village Voice* article, how in the film *Schindler's List* the Jews are not reacting "normally," but are instead swallowing jewels and saying markedly Jewish prayers, instead of consoling crying children or hugging one another. He goes on to state:

The mindless hyperbole that has greeted *Schindler's List* suggests that powerful spectacle continues to be more powerful than human and historical accuracy--and that the draw of the Nazis is a bigger draw than the civilization of people they murdered. It is profoundly disheartening that Steven Spielberg's Holocaust may be the only example of "Jewish culture" seen by millions.<sup>35</sup>

Many Holocaust scholars also find that the subgenre of Holocaust film often relegates Jews to a female or an infantile perception.<sup>36</sup> This precipitates the notion that Jews are weak and went "like sheep to the slaughter," without protesting their own deaths. Indeed, in many films, the Jews are being safeguarded and protected by a stronger, adult, masculine gentile who will ultimately save them from their fate.

In 2009, two films, *Defiance* and *Inglorious Basterds* were released, which challenged the concept of the Jew who blindly accepts his sealed fate. *Defiance* challenged such notions by portraying the true story of the Bielski partisans who survived the Holocaust, in addition to saving 1200 others,<sup>37</sup> by hiding out and creating a crude civilization of Jews in the woods of Belarus.<sup>38</sup> Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds*, while not a true story, further challenged the "weak Jew" notion by creating a band of American Jewish soldiers who aided European Jews by hunting Nazis and eventually killing Hitler<sup>39</sup>. Though *Inglorious Basterds* shows Jews rising

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Insdorf Kindle eBook Edition.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers: The True Story of Three Men Who Defied the Nazis, Built a Village in the Forest and Saved 1200 Jews* (HarperCollins: New York, 2004.)

<sup>38</sup> *Defiance*. Dir. Edward Zwick. Perf. Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber, Jamie Bell. Paramount Vantage, 2009.

<sup>39</sup> *Inglorious Basterds*. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Perf. Brad Pitt, Christopher Waltz, Eli Roth. Weinstein Company/Universal Pictures, 2009.

up, it is interesting to note that although the heroes are Jewish, they are American, coming to save the "poor" and "weak" European Jews who would not be able to do so without their help. However these films are in the vast minority. In most films, the Jews seem to be at the very least, confused about their fate but are often complacent about it. Films in which Jews do rebel are treated as special cases, and the historical facts that allowed Jews to accept their fate, such as slowly making them outcasts in their society and keeping them in the dark about what would ultimately happen to them, are often ignored. Thus, the Jew is not only seen as "good," but also weak and childlike. James Young, professor of English and Judaic studies, suggests that the "perfect victim" is, actually, a child. "...The victim needs to be portrayed as a child, that is somebody without a past, who can't be blamed for his or her own murder."<sup>40</sup> Young also states that young women and children are often portrayed in Holocaust monuments and film because they represent "perfect innocence." Such subjects in Holocaust art are "concretizations or fixings of national ideals, cultural ideals, even the ideals of the artist."<sup>41</sup>

While the Holocaust subgenre receives constant criticism from scholarly communities in regards to its portrayal of the event or the treatment of it, it is important to acknowledge that the subgenre is not likely to fade in the near future. As such, it can be a useful tool to educate, study and discuss the themes surrounding the Holocaust with subsequent generations and audiences. No matter how much scholars criticize the films, the fact that they are being made, and often well-received, shows that much of the world is now ready to face its dubious past and/or involvement in the horror. While it can be disconcerting knowing that films that portray the Holocaust inaccurately or irresponsibly become part of public consciousness, it can serve as a way to study the politics of the memory of the Holocaust.

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<sup>40</sup> "Schindler's List: Myth, Movie and Memory." *The Village Voice*: 24-31 29 March 1994. 4 April 2012.

<sup>41</sup> James Young, "Public History and Memory: Art and the Holocaust" Harvard University. Cambridge, MA. 2006.



## Chapter Two: France and Its Role in the Holocaust

In order to properly analyze France's reaction to its past, it is imperative that the past itself is put into context. France's confrontation of its past is interesting, in part, because of the unique nature of its involvement in the Holocaust, which is quite unlike any other Occupied country's Holocaust narrative.

### *France and the Jews Before World War II*

Like most European countries, the history of the Jews in France is a complicated one. In 1394, Jews were expelled from France and relatively few had managed to make a return to their home country. Before 1791, Jews in France were subjugated to the same anti-Semitic treatment many others received throughout Europe, including ghettoization, pogroms and anti-Semitic riots, even though their population was relatively small (about 40,000, only 500 of them dwelling in Paris).<sup>42</sup> By 1807, Napoleon granted Jews rights they had subsequently been denied, including making Judaism an official religion of France and by 1818, restrictions on where Jews could reside were eradicated, making France and the United States the only two countries to grant the Jews full rights as citizens.<sup>43</sup> During the 1820 and 1830s, the Jews were extremely overrepresented in financial and intellectual French life. The flourishing of Jews in France led to immigration from all over Europe and the subsequent assimilation of French Jews, including granting citizenship to over 40,000 Jews from Algeria in 1870. The Jews of France enjoyed a life without overt harassment for the next few decades, however in the 1880s and 1890s and immigration began to wane. The Catholic Church began to blame Jews for modern

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<sup>42</sup> Esther Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton, 2001) 47.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* 86.

"immorality" of liberalism, a convenient "device intended to attract the disaffected masses and galvanize them against the common enemy, the liberal state."<sup>44</sup>

The racism hit a boiling point in 1895 when the Jewish officer, Alfred Dreyfus, was arrested for treason and stripped of his military rank on January 5, 1895.<sup>45</sup> It was suspected that Dreyfus had been giving information to the German army about new French artillery, which led to his arrest. When more evidence of his innocence surfaced, nationwide debates about French anti-Semitism began to swirl in France, causing a media firestorm about France and its national identity. He was accused by those who had served in North Africa, which Eugen Weber in his article "Reflections on the Jews in France" feels was perhaps even more anti-Semitic than France.<sup>46</sup> There is still debate on whether or not the Dreyfus Affair was fully anti-Semitic, as it is noted that several factors in the French military, including "poor pay, slow advancement and the diminishing social status of military service" which led the search for someone to blame.<sup>47</sup> Zuccotti notes that although the Dreyfus Affair is an important turning point in French-Jewish history and represents an initial anti-Semitic act, Dreyfus' elevated social class in contrast with the diminished class of his colleagues almost overshadowed his Jewishness when it came to an unfair verdict and stripping of his military title.<sup>48</sup> Following Dreyfus' arrest, Emile Zola's landmark article, "J'Accuse" was published on January 13, 1898 which incited a virtual pogrom all over France, complete with the demolition of Jewish stores and vandalism of Jewish homes and several synagogues.<sup>49</sup> Most telling, however, was the fund established by *La Libre parole* to aid the widow of Major Hubert-Joseph

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<sup>44</sup> Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French and the Jews* (University of Nebraska: Lincoln, 1999) 13.

<sup>45</sup> Leslie Derfler, *The Dreyfus Affair* (Greenwood: Westport, 2002) 2.

<sup>46</sup> Eugen Weber, "Reflections on the Jews in France" *Jews in Modern France* Eds. Frances Malino and Bernard Wasserstein. (Brandeis: Waltham, 1985) 8-27, 25.

<sup>47</sup> William Serman, *Les officiers dans la nation: 1848-1914* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1982.)

<sup>48</sup> Zuccotti 15.

<sup>49</sup> Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau's Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2000) 233.

Henry, the man who had forged several documents in order to incriminate Dreyfus and subsequently committed suicide in prison. Ultimately, Dreyfus was acquitted in 1906 by the High Court of Appeal and was allowed to resume his service in the French Army. Zuccotti credits this overturned decision as discredited anti-Semitism for the next twenty years in France, ushering in an age in which the French Jews were allowed to live in relative freedom.<sup>50</sup>

The years before World War I were prosperous for France and was dubbed for French Jews as the "golden age of symbiosis"<sup>51</sup>. As Susan Zuccotti points out in her book, *The Holocaust, The French and the Jews*, anti-Semitism fell markedly out of favor with the bourgeoisie, making the Jews able to enjoy a much more comfortable life.<sup>52</sup> After the Dreyfus Affair, Jewish life in France began to flourish and the country welcomed in Jewish immigrants from all over Europe, many of whom were fleeing from oppression, such as pogroms in Eastern Europe and Paris became one of the epicenters of Jewish culture--around 110,000 Jews arrived in Paris between 1889 and 1939.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, this freedom would not last long, as by the 1930s, France had seen an overwhelming number of refugees, specifically due to growing tensions in Nazi Germany and the Spanish Civil War.<sup>54</sup> By 1936, seven percent of the population was foreign, as the recent wave of immigration was not just limited to Jews.<sup>55</sup> While anti-Semitism in France had begun to take root, Zuccotti notes that most Jewish newcomers had contrary bad experiences and fond memories of their adopted homeland. While there was often harassment in France of Jews and foreigners in general, many publicly anti-Semitic newspapers were censored.

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<sup>50</sup> Zuccotti 16.

<sup>51</sup> Paula Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939*. (Columbia: New York, 1979) 33.

<sup>52</sup> Zuccotti 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Stanley Hoffman, *Vichy France and the Jews*, (Stanford: Palo Alto, 1995).

<sup>55</sup> Zuccotti 24.

Additionally, French bishops and archbishops publicly condemned racism.<sup>56</sup>

Georges Friedmann, a French Jewish university professor said of his life in France:

Having been born in Paris into a family in which the traditional observances had been given up and "mixed marriage" was no problem, and being deeply identified with France, her culture and her way of life, and with a circle of friends and colleagues in which no one asked questions about my racial origins or religious beliefs, I had never suffered from anti-Semitism, though my name indicated that I was a Jew, and I had never felt discriminated against in French society, even at school.<sup>57</sup>

However, it is noted that the wealthier French Jews were often "eager to disassociate themselves with their poorer [and more old-fashioned] cousins," something the French Vichy government would later agree to, which would eventually spell disaster for the Jews who were not native to France.<sup>58</sup>

#### *France and the Jews During the Holocaust*

France's history in regards to the Holocaust is a complicated one, in that France is the only government to have not only surrendered, but to have had their government completely collaborate with the enemy--and with what some may call a bit of enthusiasm to do so. Originally, France had aimed to fight the Germans and joined in with the British in 1939 when the United Kingdom formally declared war on Germany for invading Poland. Although, from 1936, the French often felt confused and disassociated from the decisions being made from all sides and the "clarity" of the French position began to wane.<sup>59</sup> From May 10, 1940 through June 25 of that same year, Germany engaged in the Battle of France in which it took over Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and France. By June 14, Nazi forces had invaded Paris and on June 25th, an armistice between France and Germany went

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>57</sup> Georges Friedmann, *The End of the Jewish People?* Trans. Eric Mosbacher. (Doubleday: New York, 1968) 9.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Adler, *Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: Communal Response and Internal Conflicts, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford, 1989) 5.

<sup>59</sup> Harry Roderick Keward, *Resistance in Vichy France: Study in Ideas and Motivation in the Southern Zone, 1940-1942* (Oxford: Oxford, 1983) 1.



into effect.<sup>60</sup> In the middle of that time, Italy declared war on France on June 10, which soon led to a wave of refugees as the French government tried to find a place to settle, first moving to Tours and then Bordeaux.<sup>61</sup> France was effectively divided into two parts; the Occupied Zone in the North (including Paris) and the Unoccupied, or Zone Libre, in the South. However, Alsace and Lorraine were annexed to the Germans, while the Nord and Pas-de-Calais in the North were given to a German military governor based in Belgium. The "free zone," or Vichy (as it became known because the seat of its government was housed in the spa city) however, was not much more than a Nazi Puppet State. The French were officially allowed to act as their own, while completely respecting the occupying power's decrees, which in turn ultimately creates a Puppet State. During this time, Germany also annexed Alsace and Lorraine, making them part of Germany. The elderly Marshal Philippe Pétain was appointed Prime Minister of the newly formed Vichy Regime after his predecessor, Paul Reynaud, surrendered under the new Nazi regime. France's famous motto, "Liberté, égalité, fraternité" or "Liberty, equality, brotherhood" was replaced with a more Hitler approved motto of "Travail, famille, patrie" or "Work, family and country." Although the public initially greeted Pétain with favor, this turn of events would contribute to a terrifying authoritarian regime and death for many French Jews.<sup>62</sup>

The occupation and subsequent collaboration meant that anti-Jewish laws were to be enforced. The Statut des Juifs, or Jewish Statute was passed in two parts; October 1940 and June 1941. These laws were mirrored after the Nuremberg Laws, which had been passed in Germany in 1935, which slowly barred Jews from public life. These laws were enforced for any person who had two Jewish grandparents, or three Jewish great-grandparents. These laws limited the involvement of French Jews in military, schools, teaching and non-state professions (such as lawyers and doctors). The October 1940 laws, signed by Philippe Pétain himself, therefore not

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 2-3.

<sup>61</sup> Zucotti 37.

<sup>62</sup> Zucotti 42-44.

forced upon him by the occupying Nazi party, were much more broad and harsh than the second set of laws. Military service in World War I or in World War II preceding these laws did give some families and Jews some leeway and special rights, but in the end, their fate would be the same as other Jews. The October 1940 laws also severely limited Jews from participation in artistic life, disallowing Jews from participating in the theater industry. Foreign Jews were forced to move to the internment camps in the south or places of residence in order to further segregate them from the general society. The second set of laws, passed in 1941, further stripped Jews of their rights and introduced a new punishment: a fine of up to 1,000 francs in addition to two years in prison for violating the laws. These new racial laws were placed in the newspapers all over France. The laws were also applicable in Algeria, Syria, Lebanon and all other French colonies, even though the Jews in those countries were never murdered. The laws also deprived Jews of Algeria of their French citizenship.<sup>63</sup> While the October 1940 laws were the first official anti-Semitic laws under the Vichy regime, the Marchandau Law (passed in 1881 which made it illegal to attack anyone in the press based on race or religion) was repealed on August 27, 1940 that, in turn, allowed anti-Semitic articles to be freely published.<sup>64</sup>

In March of 1941, the Vichy Government established the Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives, or the General Commissariat of Jewish Questions/Affairs. This commissariat worked quite closely with the German Gestapo, and in 1941, several French officers were introduced into the French Gestapo, what is described in the book *Vichy France and the Jews* as a miniature version of Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin<sup>65</sup>. This Gestapo was integral in the round ups of French Jews to transit camps (most of which were overseen by French forces until 1943) and subsequently concentration camps. Additionally, the Gestapo worked to quell French resistance<sup>66</sup>. In April of 1941, Jews were required to report their race, although they could be

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<sup>63</sup> "Loi portant statut des juifs" *Journal officiel* 18 October 1940, 5323.

<sup>64</sup> Hoffman 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

exempt from Jewish racial policies if they could produce a baptismal certificate dated before June 25, 1940. Originally, those who were married to a non-Jewish spouse were exempt, but the April laws disregarded that, requiring anyone considered Jewish to have a J marked on their identification cards.<sup>67</sup> On July 22, 1941, the Vichy Government instituted an "Aryanization" policy, which led to the confiscation of Jewish property by the French government. This policy was put in place in order to avoid the goods falling into German hands and affected the foreign population of Jews most severely. Officials publicly told French citizens that they must be diligent about the new laws, even if they felt sympathy toward the Jews. Justice Minister Barthélemy said in a speech in Toulouse as the Aryanization policies went into effect that the French people must not let their "personal regrets stand in the way of cruel necessity."<sup>68</sup> Gradually, throughout 1941, Jews were limited in book publication, speaking on the radio, practicing law and medicine. In that year, 726 Jewish doctors closed their offices in Paris, leaving 200 to continue their practice due to race quotas specifying exactly how many Jews could practice each profession.<sup>69</sup>

### *The Camp System in France*

Indeed, foreign Jews suffered more than the Jews who were able to retain French citizenship. In 1939, the French government opened up detention camps for foreign Jews escaping the Franco's reign in Spain or German Jews trying to find refuge from the mounting tension in their home country.<sup>70</sup> The most famous camps being Gurs, Noe, Vernet and Rivesaltes held these so-called "enemies of the state" in deplorable conditions. Although not designed to function as a killing center, there were still issues of hygiene and cleanliness and in 1941, 800 prisoners died from an outbreak of typhus and dysentery. After the June 1941 "decrees," many foreign Jews were required to report to these camps, which would be turned over to the Nazis in 1943.

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<sup>67</sup> Zucotti 61.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Barthélemy, Speech at Toulouse. 9 August 1941.

<sup>69</sup> Phillippe Bourdrel, *Histoire Des Juifs De France* (Albin Michel: Paris, 2004) 375.

<sup>70</sup> Serge Klarsfeld, *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France 1942-1944* (Beate Klarsfeld Foundation: New York, 1983) xv.

This, in turn, meant deportation to death camps in the East, mostly to Auschwitz-Birkenau<sup>71</sup>. Hanne Hirsch Liebmann described the conditions of Gurs in an interview with the United States Holocaust Museum in 1990:

Gurs was a camp full of mud. It was clay. When it rained, you sank into the clay up to your knees. The first persons we lost really choked to death in the mud. She went at night to the latrine. She fell. She could not extricate herself and she died. So our experiences were horrendous. It is not...I would not say Gurs was Auschwitz, but it was what they called the Little Hell before the big one, meaning Auschwitz. Our food was minimal. France was short on food, it is true. Uh...the French felt called upon to steal much of the money that was allocated to feed us so instead of the little, there was even less. There were people in the camp who stole...were in a position to steal and did, of this little food. So it was really a very difficult, difficult survival.<sup>72</sup>

Following the January 20, 1942 Wannsee Conference, France responded with remarkable speed. The first train bound for Auschwitz left Compiègne, France on March 27, 1942, with approximately one thousand persons. Most would face certain death. Although this was, indeed, after many racial laws had already been enacted within the France, but it is interesting to note that the first deportation took place even before the Jews of France were required to wear yellow stars on their clothing, denoting them as Jews.<sup>73</sup> The Jews of France would not be required to do so until June 7, 1942, after two trainloads of Jews had already been sent to Auschwitz.<sup>74</sup>

Before the summer of 1942, many Jews were rounded up under the direction of René Bousquet, the Secretary General of the Vichy police. The first transit camp, or first point of arrest for many Jews in France was Drancy Transit Camp, located just a few miles outside of Paris. Drancy Transit Camp, a multi-storey complex originally built as police barracks, was designed to hold 700 persons, but at its maximum

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<sup>71</sup> "Gurs Transit Camp" *Jewish Virtual Library*. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. n.d. Web. 23 May 2012.

<<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Gurs.html>>

<sup>72</sup> "France a Personal History: Hanne Hirsch Liebmann" *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. n.d. Web. 23 May 2012.

<[http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media\\_oi.php?ModuleId=10005429&MediaId=1652](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_oi.php?ModuleId=10005429&MediaId=1652)>

<sup>73</sup> Klarsfeld 1.

<sup>74</sup> Klarsfeld 24.

capacity held over 7,000 people waiting for their imminent deportation. Drancy first opened its doors in August of 1941, when 4,000 Jews were rounded up during a mass arrest.<sup>75</sup> Officially, the camp was created by the Vichy Government and French officers oversaw the day-to-day operation of the ghetto cum camp until 1943 when the Nazis officially took over in order to "speed up" the extermination process of French Jewry.<sup>76</sup> The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum states that 70,000 people passed through Drancy on their way to the camps in the East, with 61,000 of them bound for Auschwitz. USHMM also claims that 3,753 Jews were sent from Drancy to Sobibor, but after the Germans had already taken over the camp.<sup>77</sup> Leo Bretholz, a survivor of Drancy and Auschwitz described the conditions of the camp in a 1983 interview with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

Drancy was a complex that was built to be a military barracks facility. It was a multi-story complex almost like a stadium because it was round. But due to the war...beginning of the war...that building, that structure, was never finished. So the places...the rooms that they put us in were wide open...concrete floor with piping laying around and in...half-installed electrical wires, half installed plumbing, makeshift, and it was concrete. Windows...no, no windows...There were, there were no panes in the windows. It was just the opening where the windows were supposed to go in the frames later. That wasn't done so it was all open, breezy. And on this concrete, straw. Men, women, children together. Minimal facilities to wash, community...um, one trough-like...where you...where the water ran down from in trickle. Minimum toilet facilities.<sup>78</sup>

1942 saw an increase in French round ups of Jews, including the biggest round up, and arguably the most important event in the French Holocaust. Before the summer of 1942, the French government was only deporting adults, but for the July round

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<sup>75</sup> Maurice Rajsfus. *Drancy un camp de concentration tres ordinaire 1941-1944* (Le Cherche Midi: Paris, 1996) 31.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 120

<sup>77</sup> "Drancy" *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. n.d. Web. 23 May 2012.

<<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005215>>

<sup>78</sup> "Drancy Personal History: Leo Bretholz" *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. n.d. Web. 23 May 2012.

<[http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media\\_oi.php?ModuleId=10005215&MediaId=1164](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_oi.php?ModuleId=10005215&MediaId=1164)>

up, an exception was made: this was the first time that entire families would be deported together.<sup>79</sup> This tragic and important event will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

### *The French Population Reacts and France's Deportations*

Despite its abject cruelty toward the Jews living in France, the Vichy Government is known to have tried to save the Jewish population who had French citizenship, as they were considered to be a separate class from the stateless Jews and refugees. In an effort to meet Nazi quotas, the Vichy Regime rounded up and "sacrificed" the foreign and stateless population first, and often considered children of foreign Jews (although in many cases they were born in France and, as such, French citizens) to be stateless as well.<sup>80</sup> Because of Nazi quotas the Vichy Regime was supposed to meet for deportations, they government was quick to try to get rid of their foreign population first. However, as pressure mounted to provide the Germans with the quota for Jews, many Jews with French citizenship found themselves deported to the East, as well, but these were few and far between. In fact, most Jews with French citizenship (excluding children of foreign born Jews) were able to survive the war.<sup>81</sup> According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, one third of those who perished from France were French citizens, while two thirds were foreign-born Jews. USHMM neglects to state whether those included in the one third were French citizens who were dependants of stateless or foreign parents.<sup>82</sup>

Deportations from France continued through August of 1944, with the overwhelming majority of French Jews perishing in Auschwitz-Birkenau. At the time of France's liberation, it is estimated between 75,000 and 77,000 Jewish lives were

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<sup>79</sup> Klarsfeld 57.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, xv.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, xv.

<sup>82</sup> "France" *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. n.d. Web. 23 May 2012.

<<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005429>>

lost.<sup>83</sup> On August 25, 1944, Germany surrendered, and high-ranking Vichy Regime officials were brought to trial in October. Pierre Laval, second in line to Pétain and the Chief Minister of Vichy France, was sentenced for treason and executed. Pétain was charged with treason by the French government and sentenced to be executed, but the new Prime Minister, Charles de Gaulle, instead allowed him to simply serve the rest of his life in prison because of his advanced age. He spent the rest of his life imprisoned on the Île d'Yeu, an island off of the coast of Western France. At the time of this publication, Pétain is the oldest French Prime Minister in history. He was in his mid-80s during World War II.<sup>84</sup>

### *French National Memory and the Holocaust*

While it is clear the French government was a collaborationist regime, the public stance of France can be somewhat debated. It is widely known that some in the Catholic church protested fiercely against the treatment of the Jews, many going so far as to hide Jewish children or converting them to Catholicism in an effort to save their lives.<sup>85</sup> This activity is so pronounced and such a well-known part of French culture and lore that it is a central role in the film *Goodbye Children* and plays a secondary role in *The Round Up*. Additionally, the public nature of round ups and forcing the Jews to wear the Star of David on their clothing sparked public outcry among French citizens.<sup>86</sup>

However, despite the public outcry and the opposition of the Catholic Church, France is fairly unique in its enthusiasm and efforts to deport Jews to the East and appease their "captors." In fact, the very idea that the French had collaborated with the Nazis had become somewhat of a taboo topic in France until the 1990s. It wouldn't be until July 16, 1995, a full 53 years after the tragic events of the Vélodrome d'Hiver took place, that France would even publicly acknowledge its role in the event. President Jacques Chirac took the stand, stating:

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<sup>83</sup> Klarsfeld xxvii.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Williams, *Pétain* (Little Brown: New York, 2005) 487-536.

<sup>85</sup> Klarsfeld xv.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, xiv.

France, the nation of light and human rights, land of welcome and asylum, accomplished the irreparable. Betraying its word, it delivered its dependents to their executioners. These dark hours soil forever our history and are an injury to our past and our traditions. The criminal folly of the [German] occupier was seconded by the French, by the French state.<sup>87</sup>

While Chirac admitted French culpability in a roundabout way, it is clear that he placed the bulk of the blame upon Germany, even though history tell a story of the Vichy Regime who not only cooperated, but took initiative. Statements like these, especially delivered publicly, can lead to confusion among citizens and non-historians about which version of history is correct. The public may hear such a speech and feel that while France complied, they are not culpable. While it is evident that many countries and their policemen collaborated with the Germans to an extent, specifically the Hungarian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Slovak and Croatians (the latter of whom took initiative to build their own concentration camps, like the French), none has collaborated so enthusiastically and so readily as the French<sup>88</sup>.

The road to confrontation of past events for the French has been a difficult one, and one that is still evolving. It would not be until the 1980s that *The Sorrow and the Pity*, a documentary which directly confronted collaboration and the myth of a large French resistance, would air on French television. Similarly, the events of the Vélodrome d'Hiver round up would not be cinematically confronted until 2010 with *La Rafle*. However, the fact that such a film became a box-office hit in France<sup>89</sup> shows a France that is perhaps now ready to critically look at itself, its past, and its role in the Holocaust.

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<sup>87</sup> Elaine Ganley, "Chirac: France's Apology to Jews" *The Seattle Times Online*. 17 July 1995. 23 May 2012.

<<http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19950717&slug=2131858>>

<sup>88</sup> "Collaboration" *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. n.d. Web. 23 May 2012.

<<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005466>>

<sup>89</sup> "The Round Up" *Series and Events*. Seattle International Film Festival. n.d. Web. 23 May 2012. <<http://www.siff.net/cinema/detail.aspx?FID=220&id=44158>>





### Chapter Three: The French Resistance in Regard to the Holocaust as Portrayed in French Film

When facing their sordid and unpleasant pasts, most countries prefer to honor their heroes and focus on their role as victims rather than discuss their culpability within the politics and framework of memory. The French Holocaust is no exception.

Although the topic of resistance is often spoken of in context of the Vichy regime and the Nazi Occupation at large rather than individuals or organizations that resisted by helping Jews. In fact, aiding the Jews is researched so little and so often not used in the context of French resistance, that Jean-Marie Poplain's *Les Enfants Cachés de la "Résistance"* (*The Hidden Children of the "Resistance"*) places the word in quotes.<sup>90</sup> Alternatively, if culpability is discussed, it is almost entirely put on the shoulders of the Nazis, and not the French who collaborated.

#### *French National Memory of Resistance*

France has six independent resistance museums, located in Lyon<sup>91</sup>, Grenoble<sup>92</sup>, Toulouse<sup>93</sup>, Limoges<sup>94</sup>, Bretonne<sup>95</sup> and a national central museum of resistance located in Paris.<sup>96</sup> The central museum in Paris has eight satellite museums located

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<sup>90</sup> Jean-Marie Pouplain, *Les Enfants Caché de la "Résistance"* (Geste Éditions: Paris, 1998).

<sup>91</sup> Centre Histoire de la Résistance et la Deportation Lyon. *Ville de Lyon* n.d. Web. 17 May 2012. <[http://www.chrd.lyon.fr/chrd/sections/fr/pied/english\\_1](http://www.chrd.lyon.fr/chrd/sections/fr/pied/english_1)>

<sup>92</sup> Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation Isère. *Isère Conseil Général*. n.d. Web. 17 May 2012. <<http://www.Resistance-en-isere.fr/indexPreHome.php>>

<sup>93</sup> Musée Departmental de la Résistance. *Haute Garonne Conseil Général*. n.d. Web. 17 May 2012. <<http://www.musee-Resistance31.fr/>>

<sup>94</sup> Museum of the Resistance in Limoges. *Tourisme Haute Vienne*. n.d. Web. 17 May 2012. <<http://www.tourisme-hautevienne.com/spip.php?article434>>

<sup>95</sup> Museum of Breton Resistance in Saint-Marcel. "Chemins de Memoire." *Ministère de la Defense et des Anciens Combattants*. n.d. Web. <<http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/page/affichelieu.php?idLang=en&idLieu=701>>

<sup>96</sup> Musée de la Résistance Nationale. *Le Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale*. n.d. Web. <<http://www.musee-Resistance.com/>>

throughout the country.<sup>97</sup> While these museums deal with the Holocaust on a superficial level, their major focus is on the minority of resistance fighters who attempted to communicate with the Allied Forces and overturn the Vichy Regime. While these museums, and the general rhetoric of French historiography until the 1980s touted France as a state who fought harshly against their oppressors,<sup>98</sup> it is now apparent that this image of France during the war is skewed. Lucien Lazar writes in an article on Yad Vashem's website, "In general, the French population was passive regarding the occupation. Not so the underground organizations, though their people displayed some apathy regarding the fate of the Jews."<sup>99</sup>

The majority of the French population neither resisted nor outwardly collaborated,<sup>100</sup> aside from the official documentation from Yad Vashem detailing the Righteous Among the Nations, which tells of a small number of people who came to the aid of the Jews during the Holocaust. Most often showcased in museums and ingrained in French collective memory are acts of sabotage, such as the SNCF's (Société Nationale des Chemins de fer français, the national train company of France) purposeful train derailment.<sup>101</sup> Although the SNCF did not participate in Resistance acts as a company, despite what their PR campaign has purported (only one man refused to drive a train to a death camp and was not killed or deported<sup>102</sup>), several members of SNCF participated in the resistance under the name Résistance-Fer. Created in 1943 with the aid of SNCF's director Albert Guerville, the group was instrumental in reporting German whereabouts and sabotaging German railways.

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<sup>97</sup> Musée de la Résistance Nationale. "Informations Pratique." *Le Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale*. <<http://www.musee-Resistance.com/spip.php?page=plan>>

<sup>98</sup> Henry, Patrick. "The French Catholic Church's Apology." *The French Review*. 72.6. (1999). 1099-1105.

<sup>99</sup> Lucien Lazar, "Righteous Among the Nations in France" Yad Vashem. n.d. Web. <[http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/pdf/resources/lazar\\_article\\_on\\_righteous.pdf](http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/pdf/resources/lazar_article_on_righteous.pdf)>

<sup>100</sup> Bruce Marshall, *The White Rabbit* (Greenwood: Westport, 1987) 44.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas R. Christofferson and Michael S., *France During World War I* (Fordham: New York, 2006).

<sup>102</sup> Christian Bachelier, "The SNCF Under German Occupation 1940-1944" *Holocaust Rail Victims* n.d. 8 June 2012.

Many of these workers were shot or deported.<sup>103</sup> While members SNCF has been known in the French narrative of the war for its resistance efforts and bravery, despite the fact that members of the resistance were only in a subsidiary group, the company also instrumental in transporting Jews to their deaths,<sup>104</sup> proving that to many resistance fighters, the fate of the Jews was secondary. Although in national memory, the term resistance does not typically include the Holocaust, it will be discussed as such in this chapter. Topics of resistance efforts of the French outside of the context of the Holocaust will be completely excluded in order to keep the focus on France and its image of itself in regards to the Nazi genocide.

Dealing with the realities of resistance in regards to the Jewish population follows the same pattern as general Holocaust cinema, although to a harsher extent. Originally, the topic of collaboration was left untouched in cinematic endeavors. Only stories of resistance and rescue attempts, or those that incriminate the Germans exclusively, were allowed into the annals of cinematic history in order to continue the facade of France as a nation of resisters. France was one of the first countries to confront the Holocaust cinematically with Alain Resnais' 1955 film *Night and Fog*, the film fails to deal with the France's role in the Holocaust. France is mentioned in passing, but only that this tragedy affected France, not that France had any culpability, making it possible for the film to be released in France.<sup>105</sup> The topic of *Night and Fog* and its reactions from the general public to French collaborationist imagery in France will be further discussed in the next chapter.

### *Sorrow and the Pity and French Resistance*

*Sorrow and the Pity*, originally released in 1971, was the first film to actually discuss French resistance and the idea that those who claim to have been involved in it may have been greatly exaggerated. This film, directed by Marcel Ophuls, candidly

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<sup>103</sup> Georges Ribeill, "Résistance-Fer, du « réseau » à l'association : une dynamique corporative intéressée?" *Revue d'histoire des chemins de fer* 34: 53–73. 2006.

<sup>104</sup> Maia de la Baume, "French Railway Formally Apologizes to Holocaust Victims" *The New York Times*: A6. 25 Jan 2011. 17 May 2012.

<sup>105</sup> *Night and Fog*. Dir. Alain Resnais. Perf. Michael Bouquet. Argos Films, 1955.

interviews French citizens, Englishmen, Americans and Germans who lived in France during World War II. Each person in the film was affected by World War II in different ways and candidly discusses the French narrative of the war. Discussion about collaboration is talked about openly and without hesitance, although this was still very taboo in the late 1960s when it was shot. Although the film seems to lay focus on the collaboration aspect of the French, Annette Insdorf states in *Indelible Shadows*, "*Sorrow and the Pity* demythologizes France's heroic self-image as a nation of resisters."<sup>106</sup> As this film focuses mainly on French collaboration, the myth of French Resistance is debunked quite quickly and rather brashly; so brashly, in fact, that the film was not shown on French television until 1981. The film was released in a tiny "art house" cinema in Paris, where it quickly gained momentum by word of mouth. It had to be moved to a larger cinema three weeks later, thus purporting that the French public may have been ready to face their past by 1971, but the government was not.<sup>107</sup> The film itself does not paint the French at large as terrible people. In fact, it rather depicts them as people caught in an extraordinary circumstance, paralyzed by what was going on around them. Film critic Roger Ebert said in a 1972 review of the film, "[Marcel] Ophuls makes it clear that the majority of Frenchmen were neither supporters of the Germans nor members of the resistance. Instead, they went along rather quietly with the wartime collaborationist government of Pétain and Laval."<sup>108</sup> Ebert further goes on to state that his understanding of the film was that most people didn't join the resistance to combat anti-Semitism or because of any moral compass whatsoever. Instead, they joined the resistance movement precisely because they were "misfits" or "wanted to be different."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Insdorf Kindle eBook Edition..

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>108</sup> Roger Ebert, "The Sorrow and the Pity" *Chicago Sun-Times* 19 September 1972. 17 May 2012.

<<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19720919/REVIEWS/209190301/1023>>

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*

Resistance is often looked upon with nostalgia, even though it is usually greatly exaggerated. Stories of individuals pretending they aided in the French resistance are plentiful, a topic that is broached in the film *Sorrow and the Pity*. In the film, actual members of the resistance discuss that after the war when people discover they fought in the resistance movement, many people exaggerate their own participation or possibly invent small examples of courage. "Colonel" Gaspar, a former resistance fighter, became appliance salesman post-war. His notoriety was such, that at times during his sales pitch, he was recognized when driving door-to-door in France. He recalls an event when a man told him he had sympathized with his efforts, and had been hiding a gun in his wardrobe, which was never used, although he insists he would have used it had he been given the chance.<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, *Sorrow and the Pity*, forces a nation to take a closer look at itself during the painful wartime years. While the film broaches the topic of the Holocaust, discussing briefly the Vélodrome d'Hiver and general anti-Semitism that was felt throughout France, there is no mention of resistance fighters or collaborators who did so because of their moral objection to or support of the Holocaust. In the four and a half hour film, the Holocaust is mentioned surprisingly little, used only as a springboard for those who were involved in the resistance to discuss how terrible the occupying German forces were.

After the relative silence in following *Sorrow and the Pity* came a long period of French cinema that neither confronted nor supported the idea of French resistance.

#### *Goodbye Children and the French Resistance*

Six years after *Sorrow and the Pity* was finally shown on French television, director Louis Malle created the film *Goodbye Children* based on an actual childhood experience of living in a Catholic boarding school that sheltered Jewish children, passing them off as Catholic children to the authorities. Within the film, the two main characters, Julien and Jean, forge a friendship. Julien, the doe-eyed French

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<sup>110</sup> *Sorrow and the Pity*.

"Aryan" child, faces his own coming-of-age moment when he learns that Jean is actually a Jewish child who has come to hide in the school. After a raid on the school by the Gestapo (curiously, in the film they are depicted as German; there are no French policemen or Gestapo accounted for in scenes of aggression against Jews), Jean is taken away to Auschwitz, along with another presumably Jewish student and the school's headmaster, a priest by the name of Father Jean, the resistor in this narrative. The film earns its title through the last shot, in which Father Jean turns to the pupils who are lined up after the raid, saying, "Au revoir les enfants! A bientôt!" ("Goodbye children! I will see you soon!")<sup>111</sup> Although this film was clearly very personal to Malle, it represents a distinct nostalgia for French kind-heartedness and resistance in the face of aggression.

Insdorf points out that the French have produced the greatest number of films dealing with children and the Holocaust, although it seems that this is not intentional. Indeed, Malle's motivation for telling the story seems much less about perpetuating or de-perpetuating myths or even speaking about history than it is a personal catharsis. In Insdorf's book, Malle states, "I was scared to deal with it, unsure it wasn't sacrilegious....It's only when I reached the point of really revisiting it the way I wish it had happened--with a more complex relationship between the two boys--that I could make the film."<sup>112</sup>

*Goodbye Children* does, indeed, seem more like a diary entry than a film intentionally about wartime resistance, even though it does come across that way. The film does not attempt to explore Jewish culture, leaving the audience just as unaware of Jean's past as Julien is. Neither does the film create a cheap attempt at discussing the implications of racism within its dialogue, but instead shows the day-to-day reality of life under the Vichy regime, leaving the audience to make its own suppositions about the film's true intentions or surmise their own message about racism in general. Malle confesses that he was not even aware the boy he was befriending was

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<sup>111</sup> *Au Revoir Les Enfants*. Dir. Louis Malle. Perf. Gaspard Manesse, Raphael Fejto. Nouvelles Éditions de Films, 1987.

<sup>112</sup> Insdorf, Kindle eBook Edition.

Jewish and does not even attempt to give any sort of opinion nor epilogue about how people are all the same no matter what religion or race, which could have very easily been inserted.<sup>113</sup>

The film also shows day-to-day life in Occupied France in a scene in which Julien's mother comes to visit him from Paris and takes him out to lunch at a local restaurant. As Jean's parents have likely already been arrested (there is no mention of what became of his parents, aside from the fact that Jean has not seen his mother in over two years) and has no one to visit him, he is invited to eat with Julien's family. Inside the restaurant, a Jewish man is asked to leave by a French policeman, who tells him the new laws specify that he is no longer allowed to dine there. The other diners in the restaurant yell at the French policeman, saying he is a dirty collaborator, and the owner of the restaurant even comes by to stand up for his Jewish patron. The fact that most French were silently complacent with the occupation makes it very unlikely that an event like this would occur, however, it is not completely out of the question. Malle does not speak on this scene, but this scene purports the idea that the French were a nation of resisters, who felt compelled to speak out against those who collaborated with the German occupiers. The results might have been different had a German officer been telling the Jew to leave. It is possible Malle was attempting to break a taboo by showing a French policeman as a collaborator instead of using the stock Nazi character. Additionally, as the film takes place near the end of the war, many of the parents during the parents' weekend scene speak about Pétain's waning popularity, which was a truth at the time. However, this may misguide an audience with the false idea that Pétain was universally disliked from the beginning of his term.

While the film itself is not necessarily problematic, it does feed into the idea of a Jew as weak and needing protection by a father figure. In this case, the Jew is actually a child, and a child absent of a back-story. Jean is also absent of a future, as it is established in the last lines of the film that he perished in Auschwitz. This creates

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<sup>113</sup> Insdorf Kindle eBook Edition.



the perfect victim, as stated in the first chapter by James Young in *The Village Voice's* article, "Schindler's List: Myth, Movie and Memory," someone without a past or a future who shows no signs of having done anything to offend anyone. Likewise, Father Jean, the "rebellious" priest is able to protect Jean and the other young Jews, likening the Church to a Father figure who offers weak Jewish children salvation.

*Goodbye Children* was well-received in France and the United States, receiving universal praise from critics in both countries, including the *New York Times*<sup>114</sup> and from Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times*,<sup>115</sup> the latter giving the film four out of a possible four stars. However, due to the lack of films confronting France's actual collaborationist nature during the war, it is possible that *Goodbye Children*, muddied the French narrative of the war even further. Because it is one of the only films about France and the war to come out during the 1980s, it stands alone in telling history as it was. While the story may be true, and repeated in other Catholic boarding schools in France, there is no counterbalance to the story, making it appear as though more French people than actually did participated in such resistance activities, when actual history tells a much different story. However, the film reintegrated a sorely lacking memory of the French Holocaust in cinematic history.

#### *The French Resistance in Film: 1990-2009*

The 1990s saw an upsurge in films about the Holocaust internationally, although France was relatively silent on this front, releasing only one relatively unimportant film in 1995 entitled *Les Misérables* in which the Holocaust in France is mentioned in passing. As the title suggests, the film juxtaposes Victor Hugo's monumental book

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<sup>114</sup> Vincent Canby, "Au revoir, les enfants" *New York Times* 12 Feb 1988. 17 May 2012.

<<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=940DEEDD1639F931A25751C0A96E948260>>

<sup>115</sup> Roger Ebert, "Au Revoir Les Enfants" *Chicago Sun-Times* 18 March 1988. 17 May 2012.

<<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19880318/REVIEWS/803180301/1023>>

about the French Revolution, creating characters involved in the French resistance who "fight for France and its freedom," in contrast with the characters in Hugo's novel. Undoubtedly, this film plays into the image of a nation of resisters by using the Seminole French Revolution as a springboard and backdrop for World War II heroism. World War II is juxtaposed with a time period the French have grown to become quite proud of, when collaboration was unheard of, therefore portraying the French as a nation of resisters who stand up against injustice, specifically injustice to the Jews.<sup>116</sup> But the film has more or less fallen become obsolete, although Roger Ebert did give it a favorable review in the *Chicago Sun Times* in 1995.<sup>117</sup> This film manages to skirt the truth of the Holocaust, by glorifying Resistance fighters and not discussing the Holocaust in isolation. Still, it has not managed to become a mainstay on the subject of the Holocaust in France, leaving that job to the other films discussed in this thesis.

#### *French Resistance in Film in 2010*

The silence was broken in 2010, by two films that frankly discuss France and its role in the Holocaust. *Sarah's Key*, based on the bestselling novel by Tatiana de Rosnay and *The Round Up*. Both discuss in detail and depth what occurred during the 1942 Vélodrome d'Hiver event. During this round up, supported heavily by the French police, 11,000 Jews were taken from their homes in Paris, put into a bicycle stadium without food, water or sanitary facilities and then taken to Auschwitz-Birkeanu where almost all of them met their eventual death.<sup>118</sup> Due to the uniqueness of this event, an entire chapter will be devoted to it in order to analyze the event and its impact of society at large in depth. However, the films in question both display small instances of resistance.

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<sup>116</sup> *Les Misérables*. Dir. Claude Lelouch. Perf. Jean-Paul Belmondo, Michael Boujenah, Alessandra Martines. Canal+, 1995.

<sup>117</sup> Roger Ebert, "Les Misérables" *Chicago Sun-Times* 3 Nov 1995. 17 May 2012. <<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19951103/REVIEWS/511030304/1023>>

<sup>118</sup> Zucotti 111.

The film *The Round Up* strives to tell true stories of families who were victim to the Vél d'Hiv round up, using some of the very few survivors as consultants to help tell the stories as accurately as possible, even if some of the film is fictionalized. The focus of the film is on a small number of families, including the fictional Zyglers family who lived next door to Joseph "Jo" Weismann, a survivor of the Vél d'Hiv and one of the major historical consultants to the film. During the raid of Parisian apartment buildings in the Marais (where most working class Jews lived during the period) by the markedly French soldiers (as is historically accurate), the Zyglers' preteen daughter, Louise and her baby brother make an escape by chance as a group of prostitutes pass by, claiming Louise is one of them. They tell her she must not return home, but instead she must find a means of escape. Louise is then shown in a church with a Catholic priest, the baby in hand, as he tells her she must renounce her Jewish identity and commit to becoming Catholic. Although the end of the movie tells us that fictional Nono Zyglers, the kindergarten aged character from the Zyglers family, survived (a small child based on several accounts of children who lost their parents during the shuffle of the round up from the nurse Annette Monod who served providing aid to the sick inside the Vél d'Hiv<sup>119</sup>) we receive no information on what happened to Nono's sister Louise and her baby brother.

The Memorial de la Shoah, located in Paris, has created in the past two years, a website for children, "Sarah's Attic" in order to help them learn to contextualize the Holocaust. The website does feature one French child's story, but fails to mention the complex issues of French citizenship that played a role in who and who wasn't deported. The girl in question is named Irene, and is shown on a document on the website to have had Lithuanian parents, even though this is never mentioned in the voiceover audio portion of Irene's story. As her parents had been previously deported to Auschwitz, Irene faced imminent danger and was housed in a Catholic boarding school by French nuns. Interestingly, of all the stories of French surviving

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<sup>119</sup> Klarsfeld, Serge. "The Round Up Study Guide." *Parèntese Cinéma*. Gaumont-Légende. n.d. Web. <[http://www.menemshafilms.com/sites/default/files/study-guides/la\\_rafle\\_study\\_guide.pdf](http://www.menemshafilms.com/sites/default/files/study-guides/la_rafle_study_guide.pdf)>

children that could have been featured, the Memorial de la Shoah has chosen to showcase one in which French resistance was involved. Whether this was a choice by the museum to showcase French kind-heartedness or simply to find a story that might resonate with visitors is unknown, but it is interesting to note the choice.<sup>120</sup>

*Sarah's Key* notes the role of resistance as a more integral part of the story. After the Vél d'Hiv, nine-year-old Sarah is left alone in the Beaune-la-Ronde concentration camp after her parents are sent to Auschwitz with the rest of the adults. Having told her brother to hide in the closet in Paris and locked the door when the soldiers took them away, Sarah is convinced she must return to Paris to find him. Determined to do so, Sarah escapes with another child, and runs into the nearby countryside. As her companion becomes ill, Sarah searches for someone willing to help them. They come across an older couple who are at first unwilling to help, telling the girls to continue on their way as they do not want trouble with the authorities. The consequences of resisting could be quite harsh in France, as one woman points out in the book *Faithful Friends: Holocaust Survivors' Stories of the Pets Who Gave them Comfort, Suffered Alongside Them and Waited for Their Return* that being caught by the French Gestapo could mean internment in Auschwitz.<sup>121</sup> Eventually, the couple agrees to take the children in. They attempt to nurse Sarah's companion back to health but to no avail. The child dies on their bed and the authorities come around to collect the body, questioning them about why they harbored a Jewish escapee. The authorities do nothing but warn the couple, who then take Sarah, disguise her as a boy and take her back to Paris. When Sarah discovers her brother has died inside the closet, they take the distraught child back to the countryside where they raise her as their own.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> "Sarah's Attic." Mémorial de la Shoah. n.d. Web.  
<<http://www.grenierdesarah.org>>

<sup>121</sup> Susan Bulunda, *Faithful Friends: Holocaust Survivors' Stories of the Pets Who Gave them Comfort, Suffered Alongside Them and Waited for Their Return*. (Cladach: Greely, 2001) Kindle eBook Edition.

<sup>122</sup> *Sarah's Key*. Dir. Gilles Paquet-Brenner. Perf. Kristin Scott Thomas, Mélusine Mayance and Niels Arestrup. Hugo Productions/Studio 37, 2010.

### *France's Changing View on French Resistance*

France's role in the Holocaust is, indeed, a complicated one. In reality, stories like *Sarah's Key* and *The Round Up* tend to present a much more balanced point of view, showing the everyday heroism and criminality of the everyday French during the Occupation. While the Catholic Church certainly did play a role in French resistance, most notably in harboring children, its official stance was silence. On September 30, 1997, just before Rosh Hashanah, the French Catholic Church humbly asked for forgiveness for its indifference during the war. An article by Patrick Henry in the *French Review* debating the significance of the apology also makes note that until 1983, French textbooks taught children that the Germans were solely responsible for the deportations of the French-Jewish populace.<sup>123</sup> This point highlights the history of the inability of the French to deal with the Holocaust in a balanced way, placing entire blame on the Germans or looking to themselves as a nation of resisters.

While France was not a nation of resisters, nor a nation of collaborators (as Keward points out at the very beginning in his book *Resistance in Vichy France*,<sup>124</sup> their actions lie somewhere in the middle), one must keep in mind that many French people did participate in acts of resistance, although it was not as widespread as many would like to remember. In 2011, Yad Vashem released statistics on the actual numbers of those from France who qualify as a member of the Righteous Among the Nations. Currently, France has the third largest number of Righteous Gentiles at 3,331, behind Poland (first) and The Netherlands (second). However, it is interesting to note that the prewar Jewish population of France was substantial. In fact it was the largest in Western Europe at 250,000 people, meaning there was roughly one resister, or helper, per every 750 Jews. The Netherlands has 5,108 Righteous Gentiles on record, with a prewar Jewish populace of 156,000. This

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<sup>123</sup> Patrick Henry, "The French Catholic Church's Apology" *The French Review*. 72.6. (1999). 1099-1105.

<sup>124</sup> Harry Roderick Keward, *Resistance in Vichy France: Study in Ideas and Motivation in the Southern Zone, 1940-1942* (Oxford: Oxford, 1983) 1.

creates one helper per every 305 Jews, even though the Jewish population of The Netherlands was more thoroughly devastated than that of the French.<sup>125</sup> These figures show that although France likes to purport itself as a nation of helpers and resisters, the actual figures are than countries such Poland, which was not known to be a nation of resisters nor helpers.

While France's self-portrait as a nation of resisters has taken a long time to demythologize, the image is not completely false. The films made in France have served to both enhance this stereotype and to correct it, although the films are disproportionately tipped in favor of those which enhance the stereotype. Films made in the more recent years have shown that France is much more able to accept its past than it was it was originally, allowing a fairer balance to enter the collective memory, even if that balance is not as favorable as the audience would like to believe. However, this balance now allows French citizens to discuss their country's role in the Holocaust without having to worry about breaking clear-cut social taboos, even though the topic is still fairly sensitive.

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<sup>125</sup> "Jewish Population of Europe in 1933: Population Data by Country." Holocaust Encyclopedia. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. 11 May 2012. <<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005161>>

## Chapter Four: France and Collaboration During the Holocaust as Portrayed in French Film

### *Nuit et Bouillard (Night and Fog) and French Collaboration*

Like most of the world, France was relatively silent about the Holocaust and its behavior during the genocide in the years that directly followed it. Interestingly, France produced one of the first documentary films about the Holocaust in 1955, Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*. This thirty minute documentary is largely heralded as one of the most important films in Holocaust cinema because of its brash confrontation of the Holocaust when, perhaps, people were not yet ready to face it. The film juxtaposes modern (at the time) images of the empty concentration camps (before they were made into the memorials they are today) with newsreels and graphic Holocaust imagery shot by both the Nazis during the Holocaust itself and the British and American forces after liberation. The imagery is quite shocking, even by today's standards, largely because it is real footage of human atrocities and not actors recreating it. Limp, starved bodies are shown being thrown around like ragdolls while the Allies search for a way to dispose of the thousands of rotting corpses the SS left behind.<sup>126</sup>

Although *Night and Fog* was, and still is, a painful reminder of man's inhumanity to man, its intent was never to point fingers, but instead to serve as a reminder that the Holocaust can happen again and that events similar to the Holocaust have since taken place. The narration of the film by acclaimed French actor Michael Bouquet, is even and evokes very little emotion, letting the powerful imagery of empty suitcases, barbed wire and piles of human hair before the audience speak for itself. The script he narrates from does not speak of any one country and its culpability or devastation, instead the focus is on the enormous scale of the Holocaust and its wave of destruction over continental Europe. Within the narration, Bouquet calmly discusses the construction of the camps and how they were met with only one purpose: to kill all who passed through. He states as the camps were being built,

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<sup>126</sup> *Night and Fog*.

"Meanwhile Berger, a German worker; Stern, a Jewish student in Amsterdam; Schmulski, a merchant in Krakow; and Annette, a schoolgirl in Bordeaux, go about their daily lives, not knowing a place is being prepared for them hundreds of miles away. One day the quarters are finished. All that's missing is them."<sup>127</sup> This film neither points out the Jews as victims, although marked Jewish names are given in the narration, but refers to everyone who was killed in the Holocaust. Louisa Rice, a history scholar, states that this fits with the French narrative of the war, stating that everyone in France was hurt in the genocide, and not only specific groups.<sup>128</sup> Its release, therefore, did not ask France to look at itself, but essentially verify their own victimhood of Nazi aggression.

Resnais stated that the film was not meant to either point fingers or provide some sort of cinematic tribute to those lost in the Holocaust. Instead, Resnais says, "The constant idea was not to make a monument to the dead, turned to the past. If this existed, it could happen again; it exists now in another form."<sup>129</sup> The film breaks with Holocaust film tradition by asking the audience to view both the victims and perpetrators with faces similar to our own, which is interesting to note since this is one of the first Holocaust films to have been made, therefore should have logically created a rule instead of an exception.

Although the film makes no supposition nor raises fingers to point, its release was awash with controversy, especially when it was scheduled to make an appearance in Resnais' native France. While the film does not discuss culpability and blame, there is a short shot of a French policeman standing watch over a French transit camp, one of the Loiret camps where French Jews were held after their arrest and before deportation to death camps, in the mix of the other authentic footage. It was this portion of the film the French government objected to the most; the footage of mountains of lifeless, starved bodies was not as offensive as having to face the truth

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>128</sup> Louisa Rice, "The Voice of Silence: Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* and collective memory in post-Holocaust France, 1944-1974" *Film & History*. 2002: 22-29.

<sup>129</sup> Insdorf Kindle eBook Edition.



about the collaborationist past. The film was shown at the renowned Cannes Film Festival in 1955, but controversy abounded. The German government asked that Resnais pull the film in case it would incite anti-German sentiments from filmgoers. The French government would not authorize the screening of the film with a picture of an obviously French police officer overseeing a transit camp. In Aaron Kerner's book, *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experimental Film* he states,

Resnais had violated an unspoken taboo by including a photograph depicting French collaboration in the network of deportations to concentration camps....In post-war France the role of the resistance has been romanticized, while the accounts of sympathizers and collaborators with the German regime have been quietly hidden.<sup>130</sup>

Eventually, Resnais compromised by painting a beam over the shot so that the French policeman's cap was obstructed from view. He claims he did this because French films wanted to buy the film and place it in theaters, so he did not want to obstruct this process by offending someone. In the end, the beam remained in order to allow the distribution of the film in France, but it has since been removed for modern distribution.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Aaron Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experimental Film* (Continuum: New York, 2011), Kindle eBook Edition.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*



Censored version of the image  
of the French policeman at Pithviers in *Night and Fog*<sup>132</sup>



Uncensored version of the same still, as it appears today and was intended to appear  
in the film *Night and Fog*.<sup>133</sup>

### *Sorrow and the Pity and French Collaboration*

France's collaborationist history would not make an appearance in the world of film until the late 1960s, and even then, it was still too early for the French to face their World War II demons. In 1969, the film *Sorrow and the Pity* would confront France's

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<sup>132</sup> *Night and Fog*.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

collaborationist past, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, attempt to debunk the myth that France was full of resistance fighters during World War II. *Sorrow and the Pity*, directed by Marcel Ophuls, compiled interviews from former collaborationists, members of the resistance from both France and Britain, former Nazis and influential Jews like Pierre Mendes-France. Mendes-France served as Prime Minister of France from 1954-1955, but was serving as Secretary of State for Finance at the beginning of World War II. After being arrested by the Vichy Regime on false charges, he escaped to the United Kingdom where he worked with the French government in exile in London.<sup>134</sup> Ophuls took the many hours of interviews and compiled them into a four and a half hour documentary, which portrayed France rather negatively, skewing toward showing the country during World War II in a more collaborationist, anti-Semitic and Anglophobic light. The main message of the film seems to be that a sort of xenophobia is latent in France and will rise up again whenever the climate is right to foster it. Chapter Two of this thesis discusses the rise and fall of anti-Semitism in France in brief, and it is evident that it does have a tendency to occur and then to "fall out of fashion" depending on the political climate of the time. However, Ophuls tends to focus on French anti-Semitism and Anglophobia, the interviews he has selected to use in the film seem to support his theory. Although the film does not focus on the Holocaust, it is markedly mentioned. While hiding from the authorities, Mendes-France recalls in one of his interviews that he spent a lot of time in movie theaters as they were dark and in them it was easy to conceal his identity. He recalls that during World War II many films imported from the United States blocked out the names of Jewish actors in the credits, so as to comply with, and even enforce anti-Semitic measures. Additionally, Ophuls interviews a merchant from rural France with a Jewish-sounding name. Afraid he would lose business, the man and his brother took out ads in local newspapers telling people they were actually Catholics. When Ophuls questioned his behavior, the man says he was not anti-Semitic. Instead he simply worried about losing business, saying that those around him would likely not patronize his business if

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<sup>134</sup> *Sorrow and the Pity*.

they suspected he was actually Jewish, insinuating that there was a sense of anti-Semitism deeply ingrained in French culture during World War II.<sup>135</sup>

The film makes a point to highlight that collaboration was tolerated during the war, but hunted down viciously after the war, as though the French were looking for a way to vindicate themselves. This presents a nation that seems quite willing to side with whoever is in power instead of standing its ground. After the liberation, women who were known to have dated or consorted with German soldiers were often publicly humiliated by having their heads shaved in the town square. Ironically enough, many of those accused of collaboration were arrested and rounded up at the Vélodrome d'Hiver, where many Jewish victims were collected before their shipment to death camps.<sup>136</sup> However, others were less aware of their collaboration, or at least still unwilling to face what crimes they had committed during the war. An interview with a French hairdresser, Madame Solange, highlights those who were either unaware of that they participated in collaboration or unwilling to speak about their past actions. In a somewhat clandestine venue, with the door to her store closed and locked, Madame Solange tells the camera that she was immediately arrested after the war on suspicion of collaboration, but could not understand why. She goes on to state that she believed an enemy of hers forged her writing in order to place her in trouble with the French authorities. As the interview goes on, quietly Madame Solange admits that she did actually did support Pétain because he "had good ideas," leaving the audience to decide whether or not her arrest was justified.<sup>137</sup>

### *French Collaboration Becomes Political*

After *Sorrow and the Pity* was made, but before it was released for wide distribution, the 1978 epic telefilm *Holocaust* was released in the United States and Europe, chronicling the German-Jewish Weiss family. The fictional family was used as a

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>136</sup> *Collaborators in the Vélodrome d'Hiver*. Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris.

<sup>137</sup> *Sorrow and the Pity*.

symbol for those who were affected by the Holocaust, placing them in several different camps and contexts that likely one family would not be placed in during the time period. However, there is no doubt that this film opened up a significant amount of dialogue about the Holocaust throughout the Western world.<sup>138</sup> France was no different. Although the film was neither made in France nor implicated any French people, the government was quite reluctant to allow the mini-series to be broadcast on French television. A 1978 article on the subject, which appeared in *The Nation*, stated that broadcasting *Holocaust* on television was problematic because of the complicated politics of memory in France.

And why was the French Government so worried by a serial describing only German atrocities? Because it does not want the country to awaken from the collective amnesia affecting a dark period of its recent past, the five years of Vichy and collaboration. Or to be more accurate, it wants to preserve the legend that France, with a few exceptions, was on the side of the angels. This myth was constructed immediately after the war on the basis of a simple syllogism: de Gaulle was a resister; de Gaulle is France; hence, France was a nation of resistance. And everybody, for different reasons, played a part in this mystification.<sup>139</sup>

The film *Holocaust* was shown on French television, reluctantly, accompanied by a public debate which included Simone Veil as a guest. Veil, the Minister of Health at the time, spent her youth in Nazi-occupied Europe and survived an internment in Auschwitz as a teenager. At the time, having this sort of panel discussion was controversial, as several major French players, including Rene Bousquet who had authorized the arrest of several thousand Jews in France and pro-Nazi leader Robert Hersant, who worked controlling much of the French press in the 1970s, had never been brought to justice for their crimes. They held positions of such prestige in the French elite circles that it was said Simone Veil was actually friends with many of those directly responsible for her suffering and the death of many of her family and friends. As such, Veil found herself unable to condemn their actions because of the

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<sup>138</sup> *Holocaust*. Dir. Marvin J. Chomsky. Perf. Meryl Streep, Tovah Feldshuh and James Woods. Titus Productions, 1978.

<sup>139</sup> Daniel Singer, "The Politics and the Pity" *The Nation Online* 12 May 1979. 19 May 2012. <<http://www.thenation.com/article/politics-and-pity>>

sabotage her career would face if she did so. Indeed, Veil was instrumental in banning *Sorrow and the Pity* from French television, claiming it was too one sided, focusing too much on the collaboration portion of France.<sup>140</sup> When someone in the audience of the post-*Holocaust* discussion asked Veil why so many responsible for the murder of thousands of French Jews were allowed to control the French press and hold other positions of power, Veil became very flustered and claimed he was changing the subject, unable to properly discuss the very real issue at hand.<sup>141</sup>

### *French Collaboration in Film in the 1980s and 1990s*

Relative silence followed the brief uproar *Sorrow and the Pity* and *Holocaust* caused when they were released, causing many French people to question their morals or the morals of those around them of little consequence. As noted in Chapter Three, 1980s and 1990s brought about two films, *Les Miserables* and *Goodbye Children*, both of which placed much more focus on resistance than collaboration. However, the latter film addressed the issue of collaboration subtly by including a scene in which French policeman enter a restaurant and ask the Jewish patrons to leave. The rest of patrons yell at the policeman, openly condemning him for collaborating with the Nazis and defending the Jews who are eating in the restaurant. Additionally, it is insinuated that the Jewish children who are taking refuge at the Catholic boarding school are ratted out by someone who is, indeed, collaborating with the German forces. The issue throughout the 1980s is hinted at and danced around, but never confronted directly.<sup>142</sup>

The 1990s saw a great number of films about the Holocaust, but none that addressed France's role within the Holocaust, specifically. However, it could be argued that these films bringing public consciousness to the Holocaust in general spurred a wave of apologies from the French government, although many would

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<sup>140</sup> Simone Veil, *A Life: A Memoir by Simone Veil* Trans. Tamsin Black. (Hanus: London, 2009).

<sup>141</sup> Singer

<sup>142</sup> *Au Revoir Les Enfants*

consider them too little, too late. In 1995, as noted in Chapter Three, the French government, headed by Jacques Chirac, officially apologized for its role in the rounding up of Jews during World War II, specifically for the Vélodrome d'Hiver incident, in which 11,000 Jews were rounded up and shipped to Auschwitz where all but a handful met their demise. But just the year before, in 1994, the Prime Minister Francois Mitterand refused to apologize in the face of pressure saying the French government was not responsible for the deaths of so many French Jews.<sup>143</sup> In 1997 the French Catholic Church apologized for their indifference to Jewish suffering and silence on the matter. The Archbishop said of their conduct during World War II, "Silence was the rule, and words in favor of the victims were the exception." The president of the Jewish council of institutions in France stated that these apologies marked the end of a long silence in France.<sup>144</sup> However, it is apparent that not everyone agreed with the bishop's decision to make an official apology for the church. Indeed, many members of the clergy found it unacceptable to apologize for something that happened so long ago, and for which no one in the clergy today was responsible.

#### *French Collaboration in Film and Media in the 2000s*

Facing collaboration in France came again with the release of the 2006 novel, *Elle s'appelait Sarah* (directly translated to *Her Name was Sarah*) by the dual French and English citizen Tatiana de Rosnay, or under the name *Sarah's Key* in English. A film, which was a collaboration between the United States and France was then released in 2010. Although the film will be discussed in much more depth in the next chapter, it is still worthy of noting within the context of French culpability.

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<sup>143</sup> Roger Cohen, "French Church Issues Apology to Jews on War" *New York Times Online* 1 Oct 1997. 19 May 2012.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/01/world/french-church-issues-apology-to-jews-on-war.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>>

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*

The film, like the novel of the same name, focuses on a fictional child named Sarah Starzynski who resides in the Marais with her Polish-born parents and younger brother. A summary of the film can be found in both chapters two and five.

While the story deserves to be spoken about in context with the Vél d'Hiv, the overt inclusion of French officers is one of the first in cinematic history. The movie makes no effort to hide the fact that the French police were involved in the Vélodrome d'Hiver incident from the very beginning, that they, and not the Germans, were responsible for carrying out the round ups, they oversaw the Loiret transit camps, they left the children in the French transit camps without supervision and in squalid conditions, and that they sent the Jews to Auschwitz. There is even a particularly marked scene as people from the nearby town approach the barbed wire fence at Beaune-la-Ronde and throw fruit and bread to the obviously starving children. As the children catch the food, the French gendarmes attempt to intervene and ask the townspeople to leave. One of the aiding gendarmes steps on an apple, just as Sarah is about to pick it up. He then removes his boot and allows Sarah to eat the apple. A few scenes later, Sarah attempts to escape from the camp, but she is caught by the same French gendarme. She calls him by name, saying she had heard another officer call him, and that will always remember how he stepped on her apple while she was starving. She introduces herself and in a moment of humanity and he allows her to escape.

Similarly, the film *The Round Up* in English, also deals with the Vél d'Hiv. While *The Round Up* tells true stories interspersed with fictional elements, it unfortunately suffers under the international popularity of *Sarah's Key*. The two films are actually so similar in plot it can be easy for the viewer to confuse the two. It does not help that both were released in 2010, further blurring the lines between reality and fiction for the audience.

*The Round Up*, however, does address French culpability rather bluntly as well, although it seems as though the film attempts even to show balanced reactions from the French bystanders. While the film actually has a character of Pétain and shows



him signing the orders to proceed with the Vél d'Hiv, these scenes feel a bit phony and contrived, the lighting in the scenes feel a bit off and the characters created in the scene feel much more like caricatures from a bad play about the Vichy government than a serious reenactment of a pivotal moment in French history.

Nonetheless, they are an important step in French acceptance, to see that their countrymen were, indeed, at the very root of the crimes. The movie does include a teacher telling his students not to make fun of the other students who are wearing yellow stars. However on the Memorial de la Shoah's "Sarah's Attic" website, a French woman named Irene reminisces about the same event happening to her as a child. When this happened, everyone was shocked at the bravery of the teacher, for it would be very possible for her to be reported to the authorities for her opinions.<sup>145</sup> Likewise, the film shows several women discussing how unfair it is that Jews are no longer allowed in public life, which seems a poor attempt to show that not everyone supported the Vichy Regime. Although quite obviously they had their critics, the lines seem forced and a feeble attempt at retaining French dignity.<sup>146</sup> Instead, stories of some of the gendarmes at the Vélodrome, allowing some Jews to leave the premises or nurses from the Red Cross who entered the arena in order to aid the sick should speak for itself and French dignity. Inserting contrived lines that do not fit seem to be a feeble attempt to try and maintain a balanced perspective, but in the end seems melodramatic and almost a bit heavy-handed.

### *2010: An Era of French Apology*

Apologies are often looked upon with dual support and suspicion. An apology that is issued years later, especially after the marginalization of victims' suffering, can seem false and contrived. However, Jennifer Lind, government scholar, points out that apologies by governments or officials are often necessary:

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<sup>145</sup> "Sarah's Attic." Mémorial de la Shoah. n.d. Web.

<<http://www.grenierdesarah.org>>

<sup>146</sup> *La Rafle (The Round Up)*. Dir. Roselyn Bosch. Perf. Mélanie Laurent, Jean Reno. Légende Films/Gaumont, 2010.

Historically, states that have sought to mobilize their populaces for war have crafted nationalist narratives of the past. They have emphasized their adversaries' prior violence and have justified (or simply forgotten) their own. On the other hand, a willingness to acknowledge past atrocities signals peaceful foreign policy intentions. It also shows a state's commitment to human rights and conveys respect for another people's suffering.<sup>147</sup>

In November of 2010, perhaps aided by the popularity of the latter films, the French railroad, Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français, commonly referred to as SNCF, released an apology for taking part in transporting French Jews to Auschwitz and Sobibor. However, their original apology was not accepted. The Holocaust Documentation and Education Center in Florida stated that the apology was more directed toward other businesses in order to clear its name than to the survivors. Since 2006, several groups of Florida based survivors have been rallying to have an official apology and have reparations paid to them. The groups have even hired a lawyer and initiated a class-action suit by attempting to block SNCF from making multi-billion dollar high-speed rail deals in the United States, claiming that any company who builds in the United States would need full disclosure of their pasts in order to build.<sup>148</sup> The suit was intended to target SNCF, but would introduce a bill that would force all foreign companies to disclose sordid pasts before building in the United States. Additionally, SNCF attempted to atone for its past sins by collaborating with the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris to help pay for a Holocaust curriculum to be introduced into American schools, however due to their solidarity with the survivors, Florida has decided against implementing it into their schools.<sup>149</sup>

An apology was issued again in January of 2011, this time directly to the survivors, and included in initiative for SNCF to build a memorial to those who were taken to

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<sup>147</sup> Jennifer Lind "The Perils of Apology: What Japan Shouldn't Learn from Germany" *Foreign Affairs*. 88.3 (2009): 137-146.

<sup>148</sup> "French Rail Company Apologizes for Collaborating with Nazis" *Jerusalem Post Online* 15 Nov 2010. 19 May 2012.

<<http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=195387>>

<sup>149</sup> Scott Travis, "Florida's Holocaust survivors win battle against French railroad" *Sun Sentinel Online* 14 December 2011. 8 June 2012. <[http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2011-12-14/news/fl-holocaust-education-terminated-20111213\\_1\\_reparations-programs-holocaust-survivors-sncf-train](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2011-12-14/news/fl-holocaust-education-terminated-20111213_1_reparations-programs-holocaust-survivors-sncf-train)>

their deaths on the trains. However, the apology, much representative of French culpability, remained controversial. Some, such as Harriet Tamen, the lawyer for the 600-strong French Holocaust survivor group, felt the apology was only the first step and that reparations should be paid. Others say the apology was unnecessary and cheapens the memories of the French-Jews who passed away, claiming the Germans had commandeered the railroad network and that pointing fingers was simply unfair. Many are also afraid the apology will diminish the crucial role SNCF and brave train drivers played during the occupation as resistance fighters. However, perhaps it is possible to separate culpability from resistance and find a way to honor the heroes and apologize for the wrongs at the same time, even if perpetrator and victim delineations are not always clear. Unclear delineations often make such matters very confusing, especially for the general public who have not intensively studied Holocaust history. Many feel there is one perpetrator and there is one victim and the lines are very clear, but this could not be further from the truth. Genocides by their very nature blur the lines between victim and perpetrator, making it sometimes difficult to put people in categories, thus making it possible for a company like SNCF to be both partly responsible for and a victim of the Holocaust. Perhaps balanced films, like those released in 2010, will begin to help people understand the fluid and changing lines between the two.

## Chapter Five: The Vélodrome d'Hiver Round Up of 1942 in Film

Before its most infamous of moments, the Vélodrome d'Hiver, a small stadium near the Eiffel Tower, was built for the 1900 World's Fair and subsequently used in sporting events such as cycling, wrestling, roller- skating, boxing and bullfighting. While today it is known to Holocaust scholars as one of the most horrific experiences in Parisian history, before the war it hosted many bicycling races including the ever popular six-day races in which teams of two individuals raced for six days, the winner receiving a sum of 600 francs. The races were quite popular, and guests such as Ernest Hemingway (as mentioned in his book *A Moveable Feast*) and Edith Piaf were known to frequent. During the 1924 summer Olympics, the Vélodrome hosted boxing, fencing, wrestling and weight lifting.<sup>150</sup>

### *The Round Up*

The Vél d'Hiv round up was partly made possible because of a complex filing system the occupying Germans and the collaborative French forces put in place. France had officially become a secular state in the late 19th century. Censuses had failed to list the religion of citizens until 1940, when the Germans forced the Jews to register. Within the filing system, some of which is now visible in the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris, the Germans and French Gestapo were able to color code it so that it became fairly easy to identify who was a foreign Jew and who held French citizenship.<sup>151</sup> Previously, many Jewish men had been rounded up and taken to transit camps, which caught many Jews unaware when the police showed up at their door, asking for children and women as well.<sup>152</sup>

Rene Bousquet, the secretary general of the police and several members of the general French police, planned the round up. Bousquet traveled to Gestapo Headquarters to meet Theodor Dannecker, the head of the SS in France. Dannecker subsequently held a meeting with the infamous Adolph Eichmann, higher ups in the

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<sup>150</sup> Liliane Grunwald, *Le Vél d'Hiv 1903-1959* (Ramsay: Paris, 1979).

<sup>151</sup> Zucotti 105.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 108

French police and representatives from SNCF, the official French railway service, on July 10, 1942. Originally, the round up, which would target foreign Jews only, would take place on July 14th. However, because it fell on Bastille Day, the officials decided to delay the round up a couple of days.<sup>153</sup> The French police were expected to be, and eventually were, fully complicit in the operation.<sup>154</sup>

At 4am on July 16, the arrests began. About three-quarters of those arrested were children or women, as many men had already gone into hiding due to previous round ups in which only men were targeted. Although the goal of the French and Germans was to arrest 22,000 foreign Jews in Paris, approximately 11,000 were taken by French police on that day.<sup>155</sup>

About 7,500 of the 11,000 Jews arrested on July 16 were placed into the stadium, which was hotter than normal due to the fact that the once transparent ceiling had been painted black to avoid it attracting bombings.<sup>156</sup> A few of the deportees were placed on buses that took them directly to the Drancy transit camp. The majority was placed in the Vélodrome. The detainees were only allowed to take two blankets, a sweater, a pair of shoes, two pairs of socks, sheets, toiletries, a set of silverware and two shirts.<sup>157</sup> The Vélodrome normally had ten toilets to facilitate the large crowds that often gathered there during sporting events and spectacles, however, five toilets were blocked off immediately because they had windows next to them, which made it possible for the detainees to escape. The arrested spent eight days in the stadium without food. There was one water tap, but with so many people in one crowded area, it was difficult to access. The five toilets available soon became unusable. Quakers and several Protestant nurses with the Red Cross tried to provide extra food and medical care, however only a few were allowed in to do so.

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<sup>153</sup> Serge Klarsfeld, *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France 1942-1944* (Beate Klarsfeld: New York, 1983) 57.

<sup>154</sup> Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years* (Oxford: Oxford, 2003).

<sup>155</sup> Serge Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz* (Fayard: Paris, 1983) 262.

<sup>156</sup> Zucotti 110.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

The heat gradually rose as more and more detainees entered the stadium, and the windows were sealed and bolted shut to add extra "security." This added only more to the misery of those arrested as it made the stadium even hotter.<sup>158</sup> Inevitably, people fell ill and it is documented that a few people took their lives, some even jumping from the top tiers of the stadium to the bottom or by killing themselves before the end of their detainment in the Vélodrome.<sup>159</sup>

Helene Berr, a Frenchwoman who perished at Bergen-Belsen writes in her book, *Journal*, about the day of the Vél d'Hiv round-up in an entry dated July 19, 1942. Berr was the daughter of established French Jews and thus was spared deportation until the very last moments of the war.<sup>160</sup>

Françoise (Bernheim), who came round this evening told us that at the Vélodrome d'Hiver, where they locked up thousands of women and children, there are women giving birth, infants bawling, all of them lying on the ground... it's hell. Many deaths already, sanitary facilities blocked up, etc...so crowded together they can only squat, they get trodden on. Not a drop of water, the Germans have cut off the water and gas mains. The ground has turned into sticky, gluey mud. Among them are sick people hauled out of hospital, people with tuberculosis wearing 'contagious' signs around their necks. Women are giving birth right there. No medical help. No medicines, no bandages. It takes an infinite number of applications and permits to get inside. In any case first aid is being stopped tomorrow. They will probably all be deported.<sup>161</sup>

Escape from the Vélodrome led to execution. However, it is noted that a small number of people were able to escape, one being Anna Traube. Traube was 20 years old at the time and was able to leave the premises after five days of incarceration where she falsely told the man in charge of decontamination that she was bringing her husband lunch. She passed through three check points and states she was quite

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

<sup>159</sup> Hélène Berr, *The Journal of Hélène Berr*. (Weinstein: Jackson, 2009).

<sup>160</sup> Carmen Calil, "We must not forget" *The Guardian on the Web* 8 Nov 2008. 18 May 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/nov/08/journal-helene-berr-review>>

<sup>161</sup> Berr

certain some of the gendarmes recognized her from her arrest, but let her go anyway. Her story is portrayed in the 2010 French film *The Round Up*<sup>162</sup>.

Those arrested spent eight days in the stadium, and then were transported to Drancy, Pithiviers or Beaune-la-Rolande, all transit camps designed to hold Jews until their eventual departure to concentration camps in Poland. After being held in atrocious conditions, in which contagious diseases ran rampant, the adults and teenage children were rounded up and sent to Auschwitz. The children were left behind, with minimal supervision and only a few nurses to care for them. A couple of weeks later, the children were also sent to Auschwitz, presumably to their deaths upon arrival. An underground leaflet states of the separation from the adults and children:

Revolting and tragic scenes took place when mothers and children were separated. The policemen made the separations with blows from their bully clubs, not even sparing the children. Almost all of the women showed marks of the blows. Since they had refused to leave their children, they were forced into the buses with blows and warnings of death. The children from two to 12, numbering some 4,000, remained alone, without any supervision, starved, filthy, dying like flies. They were given numbers, and that was how they were called from then on.<sup>163</sup>

The figures of how many survived are debatable. It is, however, noted that very few children survived an internment in the Vélodrome and then subsequent imprisonment in the transit camps. Joseph Weismann, whose story is told in *The Round Up*, was one of the very few to survive this ordeal. The children who survived are largely accounted for by having been rescued by neighbors or warned of the round up previously by French Resistance fighters. None of the children who were

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<sup>162</sup> Florence Dubosc, "French Moviegoers Come to Terms with France's Greatest Shame" *Fr2Day Online* 14 Mar 2010. 18 May 2012.  
<[http://www.fr2day.com/arts/french\\_movie\\_goers\\_come\\_to\\_terms\\_with\\_countrys\\_greatest\\_shame](http://www.fr2day.com/arts/french_movie_goers_come_to_terms_with_countrys_greatest_shame)>

<sup>163</sup> Serge Klarsfeld, *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France 1942-1944*. (Beate Klarsfeld: New York, 1983) 61.

ultimately sent to Auschwitz returned, the only survivors being those who had escaped before the fateful train journey to the camps.<sup>164</sup>

*The Vél d'Hiv's Memory in France Prior to the 2000s*

No doubt, Vél d'Hiv Round Up, as it later become known, has been a stain on French history. It had rarely been discussed and was not acknowledged in French cinema until 1976 with the film *Monsieur Klein*. The film did not focus on the Vél d'Hiv, however, and it was used simply as the background or vehicle for a larger plot.<sup>165</sup> The French, however, would not officially recognize the event until Jacque Chirac's famous apology in 1995, which was aptly given at the monument to the Vél d'Hiv event. Chirac stated:

There are in the life of a nation times that wound the memory and the idea one has of one's country. It is difficult to talk about such times because one cannot always find the right words to describe the horror, to evoke the grief of those who endured tragedy, whose flesh and souls are forever marked by the recollection of those days of tears and shame. It is also difficult to talk about them because those dark hours sully forever our history, and are an insult to our past and traditions. Yes, French men and women and the French state assisted the occupying forces in their criminally insane undertaking. Fifty-three years ago, on July 16, 1942, 450 French policemen and gendarmes, commanded by their officers, responded to the Nazis' demands. On that day, in Paris and the surrounding region, nearly ten thousand Jewish men, women and children were arrested in their homes, at dawn, and horded into police stations.

Atrocious scenes took place: families torn apart, mothers separated from their children, old men—some of whom were veterans who spilled their blood for France in the Great War—were manhandled into buses and police vans. Some policemen closed their eyes, as escapes were made, but for all those arrested, so began the long, painful journey into hell. How many ever saw their home again? How many, at that moment, felt betrayed? How great was their distress? That day, France, the cradle of the Enlightenment and human rights, a safe haven for the oppressed, committed an unforgiveable sin. Breaking its word, it delivered those it should protect to their executioners. At the Winter Vélodrome, the victims were left to wait several days in terrible conditions before being taken to one of the transit camps, Pithiviers or Beaune-la-

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 172-235.

<sup>165</sup> "Monsieur Klein." *Internet Movie Database*. Amazon.com Media. n.d. 4 April 2012.



Rolande, opened by the Vichy government. And yet, the horror was only just beginning.<sup>166</sup>

It is acknowledged that French prime ministers were often present in ceremonies dedicated to the Vél d'Hiv in years past, but none before Chirac would allow France to assume responsibility for this great tragedy.<sup>167</sup>

### *The Vél d'Hiv's Portrayal in The Round Up*

The 2010 film *The Round Up*, the first film to directly confront these horrors, released in France in March of 2010, became an instant success in its native country, grossing over 4 million euros in its opening weekend, proving that France is not completely turning a blind eye to its history, at least not any longer. Shot in 2009, the film told the true stories of Jo Weismann, a young survivor of the Vél d'Hiv, Anna Traube, a young woman who was able to escape, and Annette Monod, a French Protestant nurse who worked tirelessly with the children who had been arrested to keep them healthy and safe up until they were sent to Auschwitz. The film starred Jean Reno and Mélanie Laurent, both well-known French actors, the latter having made the crossover into American film, particularly known for her portrayal as a Jewish woman in 2009's *Inglorious Basterds*. The film attempted to incorporate as much accurate information as possible by interspersing scenes of Jews in peril with scenes of Pétain, and even Hitler, discussing the destruction of the French Jews from the comforts of their offices. Joseph Weismann, whose story is featured heavily in the film, was also on set in order to be consulted whenever necessary.<sup>168</sup> Jo Weismann actually appears in the film as an older victim of the Vél d'Hiv, and in a strange meta moment, warns the actor playing his younger self of the upcoming

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<sup>166</sup> Serge Klarsfeld, "The Round Up Study Guide" *Parènthèse Cinéma*. Gaumont-Légende. n.d. Web. <[http://www.menemshafilms.com/sites/default/files/study-guides/la\\_rafle\\_study\\_guide.pdf](http://www.menemshafilms.com/sites/default/files/study-guides/la_rafle_study_guide.pdf)>

<sup>167</sup> Michael Di Paz, "Chirac hailed for citing France's role in the Holocaust" *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Online* 21 July 1995. 18 May 2012. <<http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/1322/chirac-hailed-for-citing-france-s-role-in-holocaust/>>

<sup>168</sup> *La Rafle (The Round Up): DVD Extra*. Dir. Roselyn Bosch. Perf. Mélanie Laurent, Jean Reno. Légende Films/Gaumont, 2010.

demise of the Jews.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, the film company attempted to include other survivors by inviting Anna Traube, who now resides in Nice, to speak at a few select screenings to audiences who had come to see the film in France, thus making the entire ordeal not just appear to be something which took place on a movie screen, but for the audience to be aware that it touched real people.<sup>170</sup> The production company, Menemsha Films, even provided a study guide for teachers to use with children in their classroom when discussing the disturbing events that took place 70 years before the film was released.<sup>171</sup> The study guide was produced by Iannis Roder and Catherine Magistry, a film studies professor and a history professor respectively. Major contributions came from Serge Klarsfeld, a well-known French Nazi-hunter.

While the film strives to accurately tell the story of these terrible events, it unfortunately leads the audience astray from the very beginning. On screen, a message appears telling the audience that everything that has occurred in this film, even the most horrible, is true. This is, however, not exactly accurate. The film invents a few characters and relationships, such as the character of Nono Zyglar, who is based upon a child, Jacquot who Annette Monod discusses meeting in her memoirs. Jacquot was not a family friend of the Weismanns, as portrayed in the film, and he became attached to Annette without the benefit of a back-story. In the film, Nono arrives at the stadium with his mother and older brother, after his sister, Louise, has escaped to a local church with their baby brother. Nono's mother passes away, but Annette keeps it from him in order to minimize the already enormous amount of suffering he is enduring. However, Jacquot appeared at Annette's side

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<sup>169</sup> *La Rafle (The Round Up)*.

<sup>170</sup> Florence Dubosc, "French Moviegoers Come to Terms with France's Greatest Shame" *Fr2Day Online*. 14 Mar 2010. 18 May 2012.

<[http://www.fr2day.com/arts/french\\_movie\\_goers\\_come\\_to\\_terms\\_with\\_countrys\\_greatest\\_shame](http://www.fr2day.com/arts/french_movie_goers_come_to_terms_with_countrys_greatest_shame)>

<sup>171</sup> Serge Klarsfeld, "The Round Up Study Guide" *Parènthèse Cinéma*. Gaumont-Légende. n.d. Web. <[http://www.menemshafilms.com/sites/default/files/study-guides/la\\_rafle\\_study\\_guide.pdf](http://www.menemshafilms.com/sites/default/files/study-guides/la_rafle_study_guide.pdf)>

with a little girl he had just met, presumably both of them having lost their parents in the shuffle, as many children sadly did during the chaos.<sup>172</sup>

The film also invents one of the main characters, Dr. David Sheinbaum, a Jewish doctor who works tirelessly alongside Annette Monod in order to help maintain a sense of order and treat the illnesses and injuries of his fellow Jews both in the stadium and in the transit camp. The character of Sheinbaum was created out of several real people, but there was no Dr. Sheinbaum,<sup>173</sup> further invalidating the film's claim that everything that happened in the film was factual. Jean Reno, who played Dr. Sheinbaum, stated in an interview with *123 Savoie*, a region French publication, that he felt Dr. Sheinbaum was the incarnation of the Hippocratic oath, a doctor who would be there for his patients and care for them until the end.<sup>174</sup> The creation of this character can create problematic issues within the framework of the film, as it thus portrays the Jew as ultimately "good," making it seem as though all victims of the genocide were not just weak, but almost angelic.

*The Round Up* succeeds in portraying all sides of the story by noting those who helped their neighbors escape before the round up, those who turned their backs on their neighbors, policemen who were complicit without question and policemen who were hesitant to comply with orders of such consequence. The stress, however, on young Annette Monod can be interpreted in one way as the Christian character coming in to save the Jews, but can also serve as a balance for those French citizens who were bystanders either by their inaction or unwillingness to help their neighbors and friends in peril. With these events having grown to be such a stain and such a shameful part of French history, it is necessary to honor those who were

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<sup>172</sup> Serge Klarsfeld, "The Round Up Study Guide" *Parènthèse Cinéma*. Gaumont-Légende. n.d. Web. <[http://www.menemshafilms.com/sites/default/files/study-guides/la\\_rafle\\_study\\_guide.pdf](http://www.menemshafilms.com/sites/default/files/study-guides/la_rafle_study_guide.pdf)>

<sup>173</sup> Leah Pengelly, "The Round Up" *The Timaru Herald* 7 Oct 2011. 18 May 2012. <<http://www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/entertainment/film-reviews/5750682/The-Round-Up>>

<sup>174</sup> Sergio Palumbo, "Jean Reno dans La Rafle" *123 Savoie Online* 11 March 2011. 18 May 2012. <<http://www.123savoie.com/article-92495-1-jean-reno-dans-la-rafle.html>>

defiant in times of trouble. Although these portrayals may easily confuse audience members who are not history experts to think that a majority acted as good Samaritans, *The Round Up* does a well to show that Annette Monod was in the minority, and a courageous young woman at that.

The movie, however, falters in the portrayal of Pétain, Hitler, Eichmann and their cohorts. The beginning of the film shows actual chilling movies of Hitler as he rides through Paris, but the film could have done without the feigned and forced recreations of Hitler's life in his chateau as he spends hours of leisure with Eva Braun in celebration of the destruction of French Jewry.<sup>175</sup> Hitler is, and always will be, the villain of this narrative, which is something even those barely versed in history will already know before watching the film. While scenes featuring the French police are important in order for the audience to understand the full scope of French complicity, however, the scenes have a false undertone.

Overall, the film was well-received in France, although it did receive a bit of criticism for its contrived plots. One French reviewer, Mathieu Payan for the *Abus de Cine*, felt that the character of Annette Monod, although heavily based on a real person, was placed in the movie to evoke too much emotion and that the director of the film, Roselyn Bosch, was not qualified to make a film of such magnitude and social importance.<sup>176</sup> Within the United States, the film was released to select theaters, and the consensus of movie reviews was that the film was good, but not great, and relied too much on sentimentality to evoke emotion from the audience, while somewhat neglecting factual historic events.<sup>177</sup> While, unfortunately, the film doesn't quite live up to expectations, especially being the first film to confront these difficult topics head on, it still brought a greater attention to the events in France. It proved simply

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<sup>175</sup> *La Rafle (The Round Up)*.

<sup>176</sup> Mathieu Payan, "Roselyn Bosch: c'est pas forcément du travail de pro" *Abus du Ciné* 10 March 2010. 18 May 2012. <<http://www.abusdecine.com/critique/la-rafle>>

<sup>177</sup> *La Rafle (The Round Up)*. Movie Review Intelligence. Web. 18 May 2012.

by its box-office profits and audience attendance records that France is to take a look into its sordid past.

*The Round Up* would be the only film to confront the Vél d'Hiv round up for only a few months. The film *Sarah's Key* would be released in October of 2010, only a few short months after the March release of *The Round Up*.<sup>178</sup> Based on an already popular novel of the same name, this film had the advantage of a built-in audience, but the disadvantage of being so similar to *The Round Up* that it would be quite easy for moviegoers to confuse the two narratives.

#### *The Vél d'Hiv's Portrayal in Sarah's Key*

*Sarah's Key*, based on the 2006 novel by Tatiana de Rosnay, follows a fictional young girl named Sarah who was taken in the Vél d'Hiv round up, as discussed in previous chapters. The movie is interwoven with the present (or 2009, as the film establishes) in which Julia, an American reporter living in Paris, attempts to uncover the "mystery" of the Vél d'Hiv. Julia learns her husband's family had purchased Sarah's apartment and that out of guilt, her husband's grandfather had sent Sarah a sum of money every month for the rest of his life. The character of Julia is a vehicle for the French denial of collaboration in Vichy France. Chirac's 1995 speech is mentioned, however, all other characters in the modern day portion of the film appear clueless about the Vél d'Hiv. Especially ignorant are Julia's colleagues who are their 20s and 30s and represent the younger French generation. In the end, Julia "breaks the silence" about the Vél d'Hiv by producing a featured article in her magazine. She personally tries to tie up loose ends by tracking down Sarah herself. Julia learns that Sarah has since moved to the United States and committed suicide in the 1960s, leaving behind a husband and son, the latter who remained ignorant of

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<sup>178</sup> "Sarah's Key: Release Dates." *Internet Movie Database*. Amazon.com Media. n.d. 18 May 2012.

Sarah's past, or of his Jewishness. In an act of redemption, the son learns about his mother and accepts her past and begins a friendship with Julia, who has since named her newborn baby Sarah.<sup>179</sup>

*Sarah's Key*, is indeed, more emotionally gripping than *The Round Up* in some ways because it focuses on one story and one family. In addition, the film wins out over its sister film because of its lack of odd-looking scenes with French and German officials and particularly contrived scenes of French individuals saying out loud how much they disagree with the new racial laws, as though in a desperate attempt to show the French aren't "all that bad." *The Round Up* falls short of *Sarah's Key* because in trying to create a balanced portrait of French society at the time of the Vél d'Hiv, it creates a messy narrative that is difficult to follow.

While the film and book both aptly address the issue of silence and unwillingness to face the past in France, it has been mentioned by various scholars that the taboo existing up until the 2000s was exaggerated. This sort of unwillingness to face the past may have proved to be true in the 1960s or 1970s, but it is clear from the release of *The Round Up* and its commercial success in France that the interest level was at least high in 2010, mere months after the film *Sarah's Key* was set. In anecdotal evidence, several French citizens have recounted that in the 1990s, they did learn that France and its government had a role in the destruction of French Jewry in school, and an emphasis was placed on learning about the Holocaust at large. For them, France was neither portrayed as innocent nor especially culpable, but the romanticism of the Resistance had already passed.<sup>180</sup>

There is no doubt that French complicity had been censored in the public sphere, even in French schools. However, in 1983 the then minister of education, Lionel Jospin, demanded that all schools study the French collaboration and the Holocaust as part of their curriculum. As France has a centralized school system in which all

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<sup>179</sup> *Sarah's Key*.

<sup>180</sup> Anonymous French Students (Names withheld by request). Personal Interview. 12 March 2012.

students study the same curriculum all over the country, Jospin's inclusion of the subject represented a universal, if not acceptance, break in the silence. Despite this breakthrough, many French teachers were still unhappy with the curriculum and felt it lacked a thorough understanding of French complicity, namely showing French policemen in raids and leaving it up to the teachers to decide whether or not to expand on the issue. In 2000, France produced a new textbook that put more of an emphasis on France by including testimonies by French survivors.<sup>181</sup> In 2005, the Yad Lashem Memorial Museum in Galilee began to work with French public schools in order to stress the importance of the deaths of children and to help the pupils identify with them while studying the material about the genocide.<sup>182</sup>

### *Sarah's Key and Exaggeration of History*

Fransiska Louwagie, professor of French and History, has studied this issue, insofar as critiquing *Sarah's Key* and the author's original choice to discuss France's inability to come to terms with its past. Louwagie feels the author created the character of Julia, who has an identity of both American and French, in order to attempt to create a distance or an outsider looking into a society. Oddly enough, de Rosnay, the author, even states that the book was written originally in English in order to create distance from French history.<sup>183</sup> Julia, the main character who is not exactly French herself, forms a personal bond with a victim in order to bring redemption to her in-laws, which in a way acts as though the French need an outsider to direct them to face their past directly. In a way, she "inherits" her in-law's family dealings, thus inheriting French history. Louwagie calls this sort of outsider looking in and bridging the past with the present a sort of "Syndrome of

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<sup>181</sup> Paul Webster, "Holocaust past added to French curriculum" *The Guardian Online* 25 Feb 2000. 18 May 2012.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2000/feb/25/paulwebster>>

<sup>182</sup> "Holocaust museums working with French public schools" *European Jewish Press Online* 1 Aug 2005. 18 May 2012.

<<http://www.ejpress.org/article/news/france/1928>>

<sup>183</sup> "Interview with Tatiana de Rosnay, author of *Sarah's Key*." *She is Too Fond of Books*. 21 Oct 2008. Web. 18 May 2012.

Vichy Literature," (coined by Richard Goslan<sup>184</sup>) which begins to exaggerate how taboo the Vichy regime was. Louwagie also points out certain exaggerations in the film. For instance when Julia visits the site of the Vél d'Hiv, she finds a new building on top of the space, without a memorial to the tragic event. While the original stadium did burn down in the 1950s and new buildings were placed on top of it, a memorial does stand commemorating the thousands who died in that fateful round up. Louwagie also discusses several novels, written about the same time, that offer divergent points of views of France's past, such as two 1997 novels *La Trahison (The Betrayal)* by Cecile Wajsbrot and *La Compagnie des spectres (In the Company of Ghosts)* by Lydie Salvayre. Wajsbrot's novel portrays France that does not face its past, while Salvayre's novel shows a quite different France: one obsessed with its history. Wajsbrot continues to argue this, and in 2006, said that France teaches its history of the Second World War in schools as being more grandiose than it was in reality.<sup>185</sup> In de Rosnay's web interview with the author of "She is Too Fond of Books," she states that the Vél d'Hiv was not included in the curriculum when she was in high school in France in the 1970s, but does not comment on whether it was included when the book was written and released, which it was.<sup>186</sup> De Rosnay also comments that the book, and its subsequent film, have been especially well-received in France and that she is invited to speak at a French school at least once a week.<sup>187</sup>

*Sarah's Key* largely received favorable reviews in France, even by Mathieu Payan of *Abus de Cine*, who was not too fond of *The Round Up*. He called *Sarah's Key* the best film thus far of the director, Gilles Paquet-Brenner's career.<sup>188</sup> Rotten Tomatoes, a

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<sup>184</sup>Richard Goslan, "Reflections on the Literary Vichy Syndrome since 1990: Contexts, Chronologies, Metamorphosis" *France and Its Spaces of War*. Ed. Daniel Brewer and Patricia Lourçin, (Palgrave: New York, 2009).

<sup>185</sup>Fransiska Louwagie, "Imaginaire de l'espace, espace imaginaire" *Lessius University College/Catholic University of Louvain*. n.d: 319-334. Print.

<sup>186</sup> "Interview with Tatiana de Rosnay, author of *Sarah's Key*." *She is Too Fond of Books*. 21 Oct 2008. Web. 18 May 2012.

<sup>187</sup> "Book Club Q&A with Tatiana de Rosnay, author of *Sarah's Key*." *Books on the Brain*. 21 March 2009. 18 May 2012.

<sup>188</sup> Mathieu Payan, "Elle s'appelait Sarah" *Abus de Ciné* 12 Oct 2010. 18 May 2012. <<http://www.abusdecine.com/critique/elle-s-appelait-sarah>>



website which combines reviews from several different movie critics, have mostly given it good reviews with a 73% positive rating from professional reviewers and an 84% positive rating from users of the website.<sup>189</sup> English critic, Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian*, however, called the film's interwoven narratives too confusing, but felt the film dealt with the Vél d'Hiv much more successfully than *The Round Up*.<sup>190</sup> Interestingly, Neil Davenport of *Spiked Online* wrote in his review that *Sarah's Key* was unnecessary, as it asked French people to hate themselves stating, "*Sarah's Key* and other *Vél d'Hiv*-themed films reflect a palpable mood shift in French society. They imply that being 'good' French citizens now involves feeling shameful and morose about being, well, French. Sarkozy was on to something when he said he was worried about the shift towards self-hatred within French society."<sup>191</sup> However, this point of view seems not to be predominate, and most French people appear to rate the movie positively, despite its not-so-flattering view of the French themselves.

The response to the films about the Vél d'Hiv in France seems to show a country ready to face its past, even though it isn't as glorious or as pleasant and many would like. While there is still a bit of reluctance, these recent films make it clear that 70 years have created enough of a barrier to look into the mirror held up to society, which Hamlet describes, with open eyes.

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<sup>189</sup> "Sarah's Key." *Rotten Tomatoes*. TMZ.com. n.d. 18 May 2012.

<sup>190</sup> Bradshaw, Peter. "Sarah's Key-review." *The Guardian Online* 4 Aug 2011. 18 May 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/aug/04/sarabs-key-review>>

<sup>191</sup> Neil Davenport, "Sarah's Key: Unlocking French self-loathing" *Spiked Online* 2 Sept 2011. 18 May 2012. <<http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/11047/>>

## Conclusion

French actress Jeanne Moreau, who has worked with Louis Malle of *Goodbye Children*, building on the Shakespearean quote from *Hamlet*<sup>192</sup> aptly stated the impact film has on the world, "Although for some people, cinema means something superficial and glamorous, it is something else. I think it is the mirror to the world."<sup>193</sup> While some may regard the medium as for purely entertainment value, it

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<sup>192</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Penguin: New York, 2009) Kindle eBook Edition.

<sup>193</sup> "Jeanne Moreau-Biography." *Internet Movie Database*. Amazon Media. n.d. 20 May 2012. <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0603402/bio>>

is clear that film not only reflects the society in which it is produced, but also helps shape the ideas and feelings of its audience. Film can also become a strong influence in the way a society views itself and its own history, helping to create a narrative that becomes a part of public consciousness and then subsequently part of national memory.

France's narrative of the Nazi Occupation and genocide is not simply a case of using film to reflect the way a society feels about its participation in the Holocaust. While *Hamlet* suggests that art is a mirror we hold up to society,<sup>194</sup> it could be argued that in France, the mirror held up to it is the one that those in power wanted the rest of the world to see. The opening monologue in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* reflects the situation in France with regard to postwar memory; "All the world's a stage, and the men and women merely players: they all have their entrances and exits and one man in his time plays many parts."<sup>195</sup> Far more than art reflecting society, France's postwar narrative has become much more of a power struggle with those in power attempting to keep a pristine image of France's past while the majority of people were ready to face its sins and see France as it was.

As many examples have been cited throughout this thesis perhaps the most poignant being the 1971 release of *Sorrow and the Pity*, a film brashly confronting France's sins. The film, confined to a tiny art house cinema, exploded with patronage far beyond expectation, complete with long queues and sold-out showings, forcing the film to move to another venue. This, however, did not stop French television from attempting to keep the film hidden, refusing to show it to the public on television until 1981.<sup>196</sup> While the topic was still sensitive at the time, Marcel Ophuls was willing to delve into the topic. Its initial reception in France revealed a nation ready to deal with its past, whether or not the government was prepared to do so.

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>195</sup> William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (Simon & Brown: New York, 2011) 1.

<sup>196</sup> Insdorf, Kindle eBook Edition.

A lack of films showing French culpability, and the censoring of films such as *Night and Fog* before it could be shown to a French audience,<sup>197</sup> demonstrates a social taboo in regards to acknowledging that France had any part in the mass killing of Jews. It can be argued that those at the top, rather than French citizens, put the taboo in place. This argument could be substantiated by the French government's reluctance to allow the public to see anything regarding the Holocaust. David Barnouw, an expert on Anne Frank, reports in *Remembering and Imagining the Holocaust* that the play *The Diary of Anne Frank* in its developing stages before its Broadway run, was set to perform in Paris, having been an "immense success" elsewhere. The production was halted for Parisian audiences, citing that such a play may "disrupt Franco-German relations."<sup>198</sup> Even the 1978 telefilm *Holocaust*, which had nothing whatsoever to do with the French and their responsibility in the genocide, was shown on French television with extreme reluctance. As Daniel Singer of *The Nation* wrote in a 1979 article showing the film might contest the notion that France is a nation of resisters, thus opening up France's past to a public, and perhaps humiliating debate. The miniseries was so popular amongst French viewers, that an estimated seven out of ten French television sets were tuned into the drama.<sup>199</sup>

This extreme reluctance may have been due, in part, to the fact that many collaborators not only had not been arrested for their massive crimes against humanity until the 1990s or 2000s (or not at all), but many were working in the public sphere, holding positions of power in France. A film that might cause the French to question their wartime past could have cost many such collaborators their powerful positions, such as head of French newspapers. Daniel Singer states in his article, focused on *Holocaust* and its post-air discussion, that airing the miniseries put Minister of Health, Simone Veil, in an awkward position. Having survived the

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<sup>197</sup> Kerner Kindle eBook Edition.

<sup>198</sup> Bigsby 230.

<sup>199</sup> Daniel Singer, "The Politics and the Pity" *The Nation Online* 12 May 1979. 19 May 2012. <<http://www.thenation.com/article/politics-and-pity>>

Holocaust as a teenager and then making her way into the world of French politics, she had found it perhaps morally debasing, but necessary to become political allies with many who were directly responsible for her deportation and suffering in Auschwitz. When she was asked why her government allowed ex-Nazis like Rene Bousquet, Jean Leguey and Robert Hersant to live lives of influence in the public sphere, Veil became flustered and accused the person asking the question of mixing and confusing issues.<sup>200</sup> It should also be of note that Veil was instrumental in the banning of *Sorrow and the Pity* on television, saying that the film was too one sided,<sup>201</sup> when in fact, the film struggled to portray both sides of France's collective postwar memory.

While the long silence in films confronting France's role in the Holocaust from the 1970s to the 2010s, may have been due to studio and government reluctance to face the past, the French public was taking ownership regardless of what those in power had to say. Following the 1981 showing of *Sorrow and the Pity*, the French Ministry of Education introduced the notion that the French played a pivotal role in the French Holocaust into textbooks in France in 1983, instead of the traditional narrative of placing the blame of the French Holocaust solely on the Germans.<sup>202</sup>

But France continued its cinematic silence on French culpability well into the 2000s, making its first film detailing French crimes in 2010 with *La Rafle*. It was the book *Sarah's Key* published in France in 2006 that would bring the issue of French culpability back into the limelight.<sup>203</sup> This book focused on French taboos, highlighting the notion that many French were simply completely ignorant of their country's role in the genocide. As discussed in Fransiska Louwagie's article, *Imaginaire de l'espace, l'espace imaginaire*, the idea that the French people were completely in the dark about the topic was exaggerated in order to help emphasize

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>201</sup> Veil

<sup>202</sup> Paul Webster, "Holocaust past added to French curriculum" *The Guardian Online* 25 Feb 2000. 18 May 2012.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2000/feb/25/paulwebster>>

<sup>203</sup> Tatiana de Rosnay, *Sarah's Key* (Macmillan: New York, 2007).

the main character's struggle. Louwagie's article contradicts the notion that a discussion of France's crimes is a social taboo. And while likely not discussed often or at length, they are hardly something the public is completely isolated from nor are they ignorant of the actions of their countrymen.<sup>204</sup> De Rosnay acknowledged that Jacques Chirac had already apologized for France's role in the extermination of European Jewry, but the book and subsequent book made it seem as though many French people had no idea this had happened<sup>205</sup>, even though by the time the book and film were released, Holocaust museums in Israel were already working with French public schools in order to make the Holocaust accurately represent the Holocaust with valid historical accuracy, including French culpability.<sup>206</sup>

*The Round Up* and *Sarah's Key* were both released in 2010, a landmark year for France and its urgency to face its past. In 2010, SNCF, the French railroad company, apologized to those victimized by the Holocaust for transporting Jews to their deaths.<sup>207</sup> Additionally, in 2009, the French Government ruled that the Vichy Government held most of the responsibility for deporting Jews to their deaths. In 2010, *The Daily Mail* excitedly reported on the declassification of French files (which are under a 75-year classification order) will begin in 2015, a sign that France is ready to reveal who took part in the deportations, in addition to who collaborated with the occupying German forces.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Fransiska Louwagie, "Imaginaire de l'espace, espace imaginaire." *Lessius University College/Catholic University of Louvain*. n.d: 319-334. Print.

<sup>205</sup> de Rosnay

<sup>206</sup> "Holocaust museums working with French public schools" *European Jewish Press Online* 1 Aug 2005. 18 May 2012.  
<<http://www.ejpress.org/article/news/france/1928>>

<sup>207</sup> "French Rail Company Apologizes for Collaborating with Nazis" *Jerusalem Post Online* 15 Nov 2010. 19 May 2012.  
<<http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=195387>>

<sup>208</sup> Peter Allen, "Thousands of French Nazi collaborators could be revealed as official reports are published online for the first time" *The Daily Mail Online* 30 June 2010. 20 May 2012. <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1290571/French-Nazi-collaborators-exposed-official-reports-published-online.html>>

By the time *The Round Up* and *Sarah's Key* were released in 2010, La Mémorial de la Shoah had already created a website for children to discover interesting facts about the Holocaust entitled "Sarah's Attic"<sup>209</sup> and was already actively participating in creating curriculum for children in addition to hosting tours of the museum in which children were able to "discover" the Holocaust and its impact on France first-hand.<sup>210</sup> Additionally, after interviewing several students of various Jewish and Christian backgrounds who attended French schools in the 1990s and early 2000s, all stated that they remembered studying the Holocaust and that they did not remember a particular bias toward the idea of France as a nation of resisters. The consensus seemed to represent a much more neutral approach, neither emphasizing resistance nor collaboration, contrary to the supposition made by *Sarah's Key*.<sup>211</sup>

The popularity of *The Round Up* (although it did not necessarily gain favorable reviews for the film itself) and *Sarah's Key*<sup>212</sup> show a France ready to deal with its past in a brash manner. These films are unique in that they do not hold back when referring to French culpability and responsibility. While they do show stories of courage and resistance, it is clear that those who produced the films intended to produce a film showing the reality of occupied France and place it (although arguably quite overdue) into the cannon of French films about the Holocaust.

Today in France, the Holocaust and France's role is taught in French schools. Additionally, La Mémorial de la Shoah actively seeks to attract children to its exhibits and puts on age-appropriate programs for children over the age of ten, varying its intensity for older children. Adeline Salmon, the Director of Education at the Mémorial estimated in a private interview that the museum receives 1200 groups of school children per year, the majority coming from public, state-run

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<sup>209</sup> "Sarah's Attic." Mémorial de la Shoah. n.d. Web.  
<<http://www.grenierdesarah.org>>

<sup>210</sup> Adeline Salmon, Personal Interview. 11 April 2012.

<sup>211</sup> Anonymous French Students (Names withheld by request). Personal Interview. 12 March 2012.

<sup>212</sup> "Sarah's Key." *Rotten Tomatoes*. TMZ.com. n.d. 18 May 2012.

institutions. While they do receive some Jewish schools and Jewish groups, Salmon has not noticed a bias toward Jewish schoolchildren visiting the museum.<sup>213</sup>

It could be argued that the deaths of many of the most notorious members of the Vichy regime and convictions of those such as Klaus Barbie,<sup>214</sup> and the death of Rene Bousquet (after his conviction)<sup>215</sup> in the 1980s and 1990s could have led to the much more public acceptance of the idea of representing France in a balanced point of view by those in charge of French media. By the 2000s, when the works that showed France as both a collaborator and resistor were released, much of these scandals had already blown over and it was no longer necessary to protect them or their influence in the political sphere. After the crimes had come to the forefront of the world stage, the way is for the French government to no longer feel as though it is necessary to censor media in order to continue to cover-up for French culpability.

It appears the film industry in France has come full-circle, from evading the past by not even allowing a French policeman to be depicted at the "scene of the crime," to making entire feature-length films in which the crimes of the French are not only mentioned, but acted out and put forth before the world in detail. While the subject may still be a sensitive one as long as those who were present during the time of the events are still alive, France is clearly well on its way to changing its false national narrative of memory and recovering from its so-called "amnesia" regarding its collaborationist nature during one of its darkest periods in history.

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<sup>213</sup> Adeline Salmon, Personal Interview. 11 April 2012.

<sup>214</sup> "The Trial of Klaus Barbie." *Jewish Virtual Library*. The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. n.d. Web. 20 May 2012.

<sup>215</sup> Paul Webster, "A collaborator's pitiless end" *The Guardian Online* 9 June 1993. 20 May 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/1993/jun/09/france.paulwebster>>



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