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# Ivan Jablonka

## FRANCE

## Personal lives, personal archives and collective history

Tuesday October 15th | 18h30 | New School

### The author

**Ivan Jablonka**, born in Paris in 1973, is a French historian. After preparatory studies (khâgne) at the Lycée Henri-IV, he enrolled at the École normale supérieure and received his teaching credential in history. A student of Alain Corbin and Jean-Noël Luc at the Sorbonne, in 2004 he defended his doctoral dissertation on wards of the state under the Third Republic. The following year, he became an associate professor of contemporary history at the University of the Maine. He is one of the editors-in-chief of *La Vie des idées*. He also co-directs the collection *La République des Idées* (éditions du Seuil) with Pierre Rosanvallon.

### Bibliography

***Nouvelles perspectives sur la Shoah, New Perspectives on the Holocaust*** with Annette Wieviorka (PUF, 2013)

***Histoire des grands-parents que je n'ai pas eus - Une enquête***  
**History of the Grandparents I Never Knew – An Investigation**  
(Seuil, 2012)

***Les vérités inavouables de Jean Genet, Unspeakable Truths about Jean Genet*** (Seuil, 2010)

***Les enfants de la République - L'intégration des jeunes de 1789 à nos jours, The Integration of Youth from 1789 to the Present***  
(Seuil, 2010)

***Enfants en exil - Transfert de pupilles réunionnais en métropole (1963-1982), Children in Exile - The Transfer of Wards from Réunion to the Mainland (1963-1982)*** (Seuil, 2009)

***Ni père ni mère - Histoire des enfants de l'Assistance publique (1874-1939), Neither Mother Nor Father - A History of Wards of the State (1874-1939)*** (Seuil, 2009)

### Zoom

***Histoire des grands-parents que je n'ai pas eus - Une enquête***  
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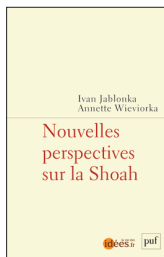


"I went looking, as a historian, for the grandparents I never knew. Their lives having ended long before mine began, Matès and Idesa Jablonka are as much my family as they are perfect strangers. They were not famous. Chased out of Poland as communists, illegal immigrants in France, and Jews under the Vichy regime, they lived their entire lives in hiding and were carried off by the tragedies of the 20th century: Stalinism, increased dangers,

World War II, and the destruction of European Judaism. To write this book, I explored about twenty repositories of archives and met numerous witnesses in France, Poland, Israel, Argentina, and the United States. Did I try to be objective? That doesn't mean much, because we are stuck in the present, enclosed in ourselves.

What my work required was that I be vigilant about keeping my distance and invest myself totally. It's pointless to oppose taking a scientific approach and commitment, external facts and the passion of the person who consigns them, history and the art of storytelling, because emotions don't arise from pathos or the accumulation of superlatives, they spring from our straining toward the truth. They are the touchstones of a literature that satisfies methodological requirements."

**Nouvelles perspectives sur la Shoah, New Perspectives on the Holocaust** with Annette Wieviorka (PUF, 2013)

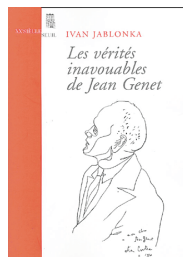


If the “era of bearing witness” is coming to an end, it is not only because the survivors are dying one after the other, it’s also because we are running out of ways to bear witness. Moreover, the generation of the Poliakovs, Hilbergs, Klarsfelds, and Friedländers

turned the Holocaust into a historical discipline and set the general framework for any study undertaken within it: their heritage became the base. But other forms, other sources, and other questions are already appearing: comparatism, economic history, micro-history, family inquiries, etc.

The Holocaust as a field of study is characterized today by its openness and energy. This book presents the new trends in historiography and the renewal of memory implicated therein. With contributions by Annette Wieviorka, Ivan Jablonka, and Tal Bruttman.

**Les vérités inavouables de Jean Genet, Unspeakable Truths about Jean Genet** (Seuil, 2010)



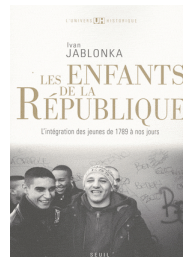
An openly homosexual petty criminal and admirer of more hardened criminals and terrorists, Genet has always been an object of fascination. Hated by the right, praised by Sartre, Foucault, and Derrida, throughout his life he tried to subvert Western Judeo-Christian

morality. Today, Genet has become a symbol of resistance to injustice and oppression, but this view completely retracts the “other Genet,” the ward nurtured by his foster family, the embittered and anti-Semitic dropout fascinated by the crimes of the militia and the Nazi death camps.

A new approach to Genet is needed. A study of his still-unpublished Social Services file and the parallels between his esthetics and Fascist ideal make it possible to deconstruct the right-thinking interpretations. Based on the works of Bourdieu, Ricœur, and Jauss, Ivan Jablonka’s study is an attempt at problem-oriented historical analysis in the Annales school tradition, applied to literature.

*Les vérités inavouables* de Jean Genet is therefore not just a demystifying biography, it is also an essay on one of our greatest contemporary authors that sheds light on his literary world and more generally on the cultural history of twentieth-century France.

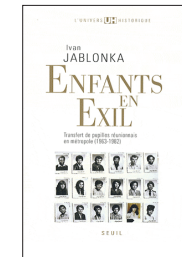
**Les enfants de la République - L'intégration des jeunes de 1789 à nos jours, Children of the Republic - The Integration of Youth from 1789 to the Present** (Seuil, 2010)



Our society is obsessed with the youth of the ghettos. But this social fear goes hand in hand with a political ambition: to assimilate these minors, who seem to be foreigners, into the nation. From the children born out of wedlock under the Revolution to young delinquents at the beginning of the XIX century,

abandoned children under the Third Republic, and suburban youth today, all are condemned to suffer a physical and moral rehabilitation capable of erasing their imperfect origins. Emblematic of republican ideals and the matrix of a Frenchness that sees itself as universal, the integrative utopia is one of France’s oldest public policies. It recurs frequently throughout our history, including in the crises of today, for which it bears some responsibility: the “French model of integration” turns out to be a counter-model, not only because it fails to successfully insert youth into society, but also and above all because it postulates inequality. From the “bastards” of Year II to the “riffraff” of the 2000s, the democratic nation-state has been confronted with every form of juvenile alterity there is and by wanting to save these youths, it has helped stigmatize them. Ivan Jablonka retraces the steps of this long undertaking in a book essential to understanding contemporary society.

**Enfants en exil - Transfert de pupilles réunionnaises en métropole (1963-1982), Children in Exile - The Transfer of Wards from Réunion to the Mainland (1963-1982)** (Seuil, 2009)



During the 1960s and 1970s, the Department of Social Services (DDASS) of Réunion transferred hundreds of children who were abandoned by or removed from their parents to metropolitan France. They were placed with families or in institutions, and no

return trip was foreseen. This transfer was a failure: most of these children felt uprooted and have suffered from loneliness, racism, and unemployment. Forty years later, these former wards initiated a widely talked-about lawsuit against the government.

Should this episode be included, as it is in their eyes, in the darkest pages of French history, along with slavery and deportation? Was this transfer of children an incarnation of a neocolonialism we don’t dare name? The operation’s architect, Michel Debré, was worried about the population explosion threatening the island, but his primary aim was to integrate Réunion into the nation as a whole. A disquieting conclusion must therefore be drawn: the migration of wards from Réunion, with all the suffering it caused, was undertaken because it fit the republican ideal.

***Ni père ni mère - Histoire des enfants de l'Assistance publique (1874-1939), Neither Mother Nor Father – A History of Wards of the State (1874-1939)*** (Seuil, 2009)



The orphans of Saint Vincent de Paul, wards of the state and foster children incarnate the destitution of young victims of human cruelty. Tom Thumb and Cosette, abandoned at a young age by their parents, grab our imaginations. Today, very few children are abandoned

in France but in the early 19th century, 30,000 newborns were taken into orphanages every year.

In the villages where they were placed, the daily lives of these “bastards” were often filled with cold, hunger, illness, and shame. Reviving the optimism of the French Revolution, the Third Republic wanted to put an end to this situation, but equal opportunity remained a mirage. This failed ambition leads the historian to bring back to life the world of child mothers, leaders ringleaders, nursemaids, and pencil pushers who earned their living from the circulation of children without families, an industry at once humanitarian and cruel.

By making the voices murmuring in the archives heard, *Ni père ni mère* tries to understand the experience of life without parents—a blend of humiliation, loneliness, and freedom.

