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***Occupation and 20 ans après: Representing Jewish
Activism in Montreal, 1968-1977***

Two NFB documentaries, Bill Reid's Occupation (1970) and Jacques Bensimon's 20 ans après (1977) offer an opportunity to reflect on the diverse politics of Montreal Jews during and following Quebec's Quiet Revolution. Reading these films together, I argue that Montreal Jewish artists and activists should be considered in relation to the complex local and international politics of postcolonial dissent that marked the late 1960s and early 1970s, and that their experiences defy the narrow confines of a 'third solitude.'

"Everybody, let's get upstairs! Let's take a stand now! Let's go. EVERYBODY that believes in justice take a stand. Don't sit on your asses anymore. Move up there and take a stand!" Robert Hubsher uttered these words at Sir George Williams University (SGW) on 20 January 1969, passionately encouraging his peers to join the occupation of the computer room on the ninth floor of the Hall Building in protest of the University administration's failure to deal appropriately with accusations of racism toward a group of West Indian students from their professor Perry Anderson.¹ Featured as an interview subject in Mina Shum's National Film Board (NFB) documentary *Ninth Floor* (2016), Hubsher explains that being Jewish, his early experiences of antisemitism were a factor in his decision to stand up and support his black peers experiencing racism. Archival footage of Hubsher's speech was discovered by the *Ninth Floor* film crew in the Records Management and Archives at Concordia University.² This unique find and its inclusion in Shum's documentary demonstrates the great potential for film as an artefact of Quebec Jewish arts and activism in the 1960s and 1970s, a subject not yet explored in Canadian Jewish studies.

Hubsher's active role in the SGW Affair is an example of how Jews participated in what historian Sean Mills called Montreal's 1960s shared "postcolonial grammar of dissent"³ Mills observed that Montreal's Labour, Black Power, Women's and French unilingualism movements in the late 1960s and early 70s all drew inspiration from thinkers such as Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon, to theorize political struggles in Quebec as related to the work of "decolonization." Two NFB documentaries, *Occupation* (1970) and *20 ans après* (1977) offer an opportunity to reflect on the diverse politics of Montreal Jews as part of this pivotal artistic, activist, and intellectual period in Quebec history. Moroccan-born Jewish filmmaker Jacques Bensimon was assistant director on the crew of *Occupation*, a film made under the NFB's Challenge for Change program which followed the protests of McGill University political science students who in 1968 fought for better representation in the decision-making processes of their department. The film *20 ans après* (*Twenty Years After*), directed by Bensimon in the NFB's French and Multiculturalism Programs, is a meditation on the multiple initiatives of Moroccan Jews in advocating for themselves as francophone Jews in the province of Quebec. Reading these films together through an intersectional analysis, I argue that Montreal Jewish artists and activists should be considered in relation to the complex local and international politics that marked the late 1960s and early 1970s, and that their experiences defy the narrow confines of a 'third solitude.'

Scholars in Canadian Jewish studies often use the framework of ‘third solitude’ to describe the experiences of Quebec’s Jews as a community that developed between a dominant English-speaking Protestant minority and a disenfranchised French-speaking Catholic majority.⁴ The massive wave of Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews who immigrated to Quebec from the 1880s to 1920s created schools, hospitals, and mutual benefits societies to support the community at a time when social services (inasmuch as they existed) were bifurcated along linguistic and religious lines. Under Quebec’s confessional school system Jews came to be designated as “Protestant” and thus attended English-language public schools while their parents were prohibited from sitting on school boards.⁵ Living in poor, densely-populated Jewish neighbourhoods along the ‘immigrant corridor’ of St. Lawrence Boulevard/Boulevard St-Laurent, between the French and English populations of Montreal, the Jewish population developed a unique and robust literary culture demonstrated in the works of A.M. Klein and Mordecai Richler. But this ‘solitude,’ which had never been total, decreased in the 1960s as the anglicized Ashkenazi Jews largely entered the middle class and moved out of the traditional neighbourhoods, into the west suburbs of the city.⁶ During this decade, Quebec worked to shed its conservative French Catholicism and Anglo-Celtic economic dominance. The province underwent a process of francization, modernization, and secularization, known as the Quiet Revolution, which led to the election of the sovereigntist Parti Québécois in 1976.

The transformation happening in Quebec, however, was not exactly ‘quiet.’ Throughout the 1960s the Quebec independence movement Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) orchestrated violent attacks on people and property, culminating in the kidnapping of British Trade Commissioner James Cross and the murder of Quebec Labour Minister Pierre Laporte in 1970. The FLQ kidnappings and the Canadian government’s response, which was to enact the War Measures Act to round up anyone suspected of terrorist activities, is known as the October Crisis. While students in the US were fighting against the Vietnam War, for nuclear disarmament and civil rights, and students in France joined with workers to orchestrate a general strike in May 1968, students at Quebec universities and CEGEPs participated in various forms of protest for the rights of Quebec’s francophone minority to equal educational opportunities, for fair treatment for taxi drivers, for access to birth control, and against racism. Bill Reid’s *Occupation* is a rare document of student activism at Montreal’s McGill University during this period and captured Jewish participation in the era’s radical politics.

On 27 September 1968, the *McGill Daily* reported that students of the Political Science Association (PSA) issued demands for the democratization of the structure of the Political Science section of the Department of Economics and Political Science at McGill University:

The Association feels that the widespread discontent among students in the department last year resulted from irrelevance of the courses to problems in the modern world. According to the Association, the department tends to accept only the “American school” of political thought and analysis which by necessity excludes such critical schools as Marxism.⁷

In response to student protests, between 1967 and 1970 the university held the “Tripartite Commission on the Nature of the University,” where members of administration, faculty, and students met regularly to discuss the issue of democracy at the institution.⁸ From this experience, and inspired by student protest movements especially in the US and France, came the recognition that students had the right to participate in policy making decisions at the University. Harry Edel, a graduate student in Political Science, was one of four men elected to negotiate on the students’ behalf with the faculty. He called for the PSA to “adopt the strategy and tactics of labour unions in negotiating, and that the fight for democratizing the Political Science Department should be viewed as only one small element in the overall struggle for a democratized and critical university and this, in turn, as only one part of the overall movement for the establishment of a free society.”⁹ Conflict grew between the general student population and the PSA who they criticized as a “Marxist minority.” On 26 November 1968, the PSA occupied the fourth floor of the newly constructed, ten-story, brutalist-style Stephen Leacock Building where the Political Science department was housed, demanding greater control over hiring practices in the department. This event occurred just three months before the SGW Affair and a couple weeks after the Congress of Black Writers, organized by West Indian students at McGill and SGW Universities.¹⁰ The crew of Bill Reid’s *Occupation* lived with the McGill students during their two-week strike, and captured the events on film.

Occupation was produced as part of the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle (CFC/SN) program at the National Film Board, which was in place from 1967 to 1980. With the original impetus to address poverty in Canada through documentary cinema, this program encouraged filmmakers to work in collaboration with communities, empowering them with tools and basic skills in video production so they could collectively explore solutions to social problems, rather than merely documenting or speaking for the communities.¹¹ *Occupation* depicted the struggles of students at the prestigious McGill University and thus did not address the CFC/SN’s mandate to focus on poverty. It did, however, seek to achieve the CFC’s fourth objective: “To provoke social change by changing attitudes which hinder the development of equal opportunities for everyone and inhibit their meaningful participation in society.”¹² The film exemplified these goals by focusing on the processes of dialogue among various students and faculty members, and by reducing the creative role and subjectivity of the director.¹³ This is clear in the lack of subtitling to identify individuals and in the restriction of narrative voiceover only to the opening credits, in order to

explain the protest setting. While Reid, the director, is featured in a couple scenes speaking to the students, his opinion (“either this is some kind of game, or else there’s something really important that makes people go through all that...”) served as a prompt for the students to speak. The film effectively demonstrated social change – students standing up for democracy and working out issues amongst themselves and the professors – in progress.

Occupation emphasized a collective, rather than individuals, working for social change, and an examination of the role played by Jewish individuals in the film paints a picture of Jewish life in Quebec in the 1960s that shows the limits of the third solitude framework. Because McGill University had quotas on Jewish student enrollment until the 1960s, it is significant that so many individuals represented in the film – student protestors, faculty – and the film crew itself were Jews.¹⁴ By the 1960s, as indicated above, Jews had become anglicized and had generally moved up the economic ladder. McGill was considered a place of prestige for Jewish students, and their numbers of enrollment increased as did their representation in the faculty. This can be attributed to many factors including the entry of baby boomers into university, the large proportion of Jews in Montreal’s Anglophone population, lack of access to education in French, and Jewish emphasis on education. This analysis of *Occupation* focuses on two sequences that portray Jewish individuals participating on both sides of the conflict in the Political Science department. Together, these sequences show Jews as actors influenced by local and international politics, whose position in Quebec was complicated by power, gender, religion, and race.

The first sequence showed a confrontation between PSA students picketing a classroom, and students who disagreed with the strike and chose to attend class. A succession of quick cuts depicted a standoff between an unnamed student yelling at the strikers and Harry Edel explaining calmly the position and tactics of the strikers. “Strike-breakers, scabs they call us,” declared the student. “I think the majority of the kids here were behind the strike. Then why the hell are you afraid to let these kids go into their classroom and discuss the issue rationally like human beings...?” Edel responded: “A strike normally involves the disruption of normal activity... [he gestured to the man sitting before him] If you have a professor sitting at the front of the class, listening to students fighting amongst themselves, that is normal activity... let him speak for himself.” The professor responded: “My primary obligation is to my students and the group that was supposed to meet today, they asked me to come here, I came and they came.”¹⁵ The frame captured two Jewish men, Edel standing and Professor Harold Waller seated. They appeared to be close in age, both in thick rimmed glasses. Waller and the students in the classroom were more formally dressed, suits and ties, clean cut and neat hair. Edel wore an open collar shirt; he was unshaved with a messy mop of curls. The worm’s eye camera angle created the impression of Edel and the protestors looming over Waller.

His overt politics, accent, and demeanor revealed Edel's subtle Jewish *difference*. Byers and Schwartz argue that multiculturalism discourse in Canada often reads Jews as a 'white' homogenous ethnic/religious/cultural unit and undermines internal Jewish racial diversity and access to power.¹⁶ In this regard, *Occupation* does not distinguish Edel explicitly from his non-Jewish peers, but he is one of a handful of individuals in the film identified by name and received a significant amount of screen-time to speak about his politics. The *McGill Daily* described Edel on 31 October 1968 as:

An experienced political organizer and known as one of the student left's backroom boys. His deep voice and vague foreign accent give him an air of distinction: he inspires an abnormal degree of both admiration and dislike. Often operates poorly on a human level. Helped found Students for a Democratic University in 1966.¹⁷

The "vague foreign accent" may have referred to the twang of Yiddish. Edel was graduate of Baron Byng High School (1960), in the Jewish working-class neighbourhood of the Plateau, and had worked at camp B'nai B'rith.¹⁸ In the same article, the Jewish difference of a McGill professor Dr. Maxwell Cohen was also mentioned:

He will not become Principal as he must have once dreamed, because his quick temper leads him to commit indiscretions that embarrass the university, and also because McGill's white fathers are not prepared to pick the first Jewish Principal.¹⁹

Here the difference was a stereotype that marked the Jewish professor as distinct from the 'white' majority. The language of the *McGill Daily* in 1968 revealed what is obscured in the representation of Jewish individuals in *Occupation*: Jewish individuals may have blended with their non-Jewish peers at McGill by the 1960s, but a history of antisemitism lurked in the background and Jews were not full members of Quebec's white English Protestant elite. At the same time, Jews were not homogenous and displayed differences in power and politics amongst themselves.

Another Jewish individual in the next part of the sequence added to the range diversity amongst the Jewish participants in the protest. Professor John Shingler was invited to give a statement to a crowd of students occupying the Political Science department. In a South African accent, he declared:

I am unequivocally in favour of the student strike and occupation and their demands...Engagement in the discourse of ideas is something which should not be arrived at through pressure of political demand. However, there comes a time when, and that is why I have changed my position, there comes a time when those who have substantial authority in the institution

yield only under pressure of political demand.²⁰

Shingler was president of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) from 1959 to 1960, himself a student activist against apartheid, though not a communist.²¹ His involvement in the protest points to the influence of global anti-colonial politics beyond the North American context of the politics of Jews in Quebec in the 1960s. Unlike Waller, who was against the student protest and concerned about his own lack of power as a newly-hired assistant professor, Shingler, perhaps feeling more secure in the department and influenced by his activist background, publicly shifted his position in favour of the students, showing the process of democracy in action.²²

The diversity of Jewish political positions and their complex relationships to whiteness and power is also represented in a second sequence. This exquisitely-shot scene captured the first session of negotiations between the PSA and the faculty before an auditorium and live closed-circuit television. The NFB team filmed a student crew recording the event, almost fetishizing the large cameras and machinery while students and faculty gave their speeches. Shum opted for a similar technique in *Ninth Floor*, showing her interview subjects filmed behind old production room equipment, television screens and reel to reel recorders, to emphasize the surveillance experienced by the Black student protestors. In *Occupation*, Reid's technique emphasized the Challenge for Change principle of including the individuals involved in working for social change, though it also served as a documentation of the media process in 1968. A split screen, viewed from the perspective of the closed-circuit television crew, showed students and faculty side-by-side as equals in the negotiation. The students explained their disagreement with the democratic pluralist orientation of their professors and with their refusal to teach Marxist ideology. One student claimed:

As soon as a person comes along who is from a completely different ideological persuasion, ie, Han Suyin, there are letters to the paper saying that this woman, all she can do is come along and perpetrate propaganda and that she's talking a load of rubbish. This seems to answer Janice Stein's statement before that she doesn't understand what orientation is.²³

While the right side of the split screen showed the student in a Franz Joseph beard and slight British accent speaking, the left screen panned across the table of male faculty members, pipes and cigarettes in hand, to settle on Janice Stein at the end of the table in thick round glasses, sweater, arms crossed on the table.²⁴ Another student, Arnie August, addressed her:

I ask Mrs. Stein, on your reading list in Asia, why, out of 80 things that you list in Asia, 80 books, why are 10 out of 80 only mentioning the people

that you know in the department for example yourself, Steinberg, Nobles, Brecher, etc. 10 out of 80. Never do we see anything about Lennon, nor do we see anything about any other position.²⁵

August then challenged Professor Baldev Raj Nayar for not including radical Third World perspectives in his course on political development.

Stein did not speak in the film but senior male faculty member Michael Brecher responded by accusing the students of McCarthyism. Nayar followed by reacting against the student's accusation that the department is monolithic for telling the students that the faculty is already diverse in its orientations and open to different schools of political thought. He then addressed an issue raised by the students that the topic of Black Power should be taught by a black person:

If somehow blood is necessary for the communication of ideas, none of the people in our department except perhaps for myself or Professor Mallory who teaches Canada and I who teach Asian power would be qualified to teach here ... if blood is essential then the whites can't understand what the black man is saying ... I am open to the idea that blood isn't essential to understanding ideas ... but you are making it an essential element, that one has to be black in order to communicate about black power.²⁶

A Jewish student, Alan Herscovici responded by first correcting the wrong pronunciation of his name by the mediator.²⁷ He conceded that Nayar had made some important points but lamented that there was still a lack in communication between faculty and students. It was not a question of blood, he claimed, but a question of ideas:

If a black man is what is needed to teach a course on black history then perhaps it is because only the black man is intimately involved with the ideas. It's not a racist idea. A white man who is capable of identifying with these ideas, perhaps, might be just as capable. But it's not a question of blood because here we are all most of us in the university let's say, all pretty well white, middle class people, all within a certain mould, we're all individuals within this mould. It's very free and egalitarian and so on. But it's all within a certain context you know, certain people who come from outside this mould will see very quickly the reaction form itself. How quickly the shell closes. It's very open until anything comes to challenge the perspectives, the ideas of this basic monolith.²⁸

Herscovici disconnected the concept of race from biology, pointing instead to how racialized individuals and radical ideologies challenge the monolithic 'white' mould. He included himself as white in this framework, but felt compelled through his ac-

tivism to challenge his privileged position. In August's speech, he revealed a chain of power of Jews in the department (without naming them as such): Brecher, followed Steinberg and Stein who were both his female graduate students. These Jewish academics are read as white in the film, a powerful elite with ideologies to the right of those such as the novelist Han Suyin, who had delivered "a brisk and cutting attack on Western society and on the framework of analysis used by Western scholars" during her Beatty lectures at McGill in October 1968, setting off a wave of controversy.²⁹ Even Nayar, an "Asian," is amalgamated into whiteness by his refusal to teach radical Third World perspective. Whiteness, as Herscovici put it, referred to the power structure of the university that omitted diverse political opinions and racialized individuals "outside the mould." Indeed, the PSA protest occurred just weeks after the Congress of Black Writers brought the Trinidadian-born Civil Rights activist Stokely Carmichael, and Halifax activist Rocky Jones, to speak at McGill University on Black Power.³⁰ *Occupation* compels us to think about Jewishness in the 1960s through an intersectional lens and question the extent of Jewishness as an outsider status and form of racialization in Quebec in relation to Black or Asian Montrealers and French-Canadians themselves negotiating their social and political positions.

Occupation only captured a glimpse of the diverse activism of Jewish faculty and students at McGill University in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Harold Troper documented Jewish student activism in support of Israel in 1967 and Soviet Jewry in the 1970s.³¹ McGill Political Science lecturer and activist Stanley Gray played a key role in Operation McGill Français, the 1969 movement calling for the francization of the University, while president-elect of the McGill Student's Society Julius Grey and Hillel President Morton Weinfeld at the time opposed it. Grey and Weinfeld did, however, support the cause in calling on the Quebec government to create a second French-language university.³² Allan Feingold and Donna Cherniak, the students who co-authored the *Birth Control Handbook* in 1968 when it was illegal to disseminate literature about birth control in Canada, were also part of this sphere of Jewish activism at McGill.³³ Jewish activism was informed by the community's strong histories of antisemitism, socialism, communism, and Zionism. It was also informed by these Jewish young adults' desire to prove themselves against their parents' generation. The radical activism practiced by some Montreal Jews, as depicted in *Occupation*, agrees with Mills' thesis on the postcolonial grammar of dissent of 1960s Montreal, that "radical ideas crossed linguistic and ethnic boundaries, and radical groups benefited from each other's analyses." In addition, dissent in "First World" Montreal is impossible to understand without looking at its relation to global "Third World" movements.³⁴ Reading *Occupation* alongside Mills' thesis makes apparent the prominence of Jews in the public sphere in Sixties Montreal and the diversity of their politics and activism, revealing them as participants in Quebec politics beyond the limits of a 'third solitude.'

The arts and activism of Moroccan Jews in Montreal in the 1960s and 1970s complicated both the 'whiteness' of Quebec Jews and the 'third solitude' thesis, highlighting the different experiences of racialization, languages, and politics of this community. This is apparent in Jacques Bensimon's 1977 documentary *20 ans après*, that took stock of the challenges faced by Francophone North African Jews in Quebec, twenty years after the first immigrants settled. The film's opening sequence posed this challenge bluntly. Over the image of a male child undergoing circumcision, a voiceover narration stated: "Of a Moroccan Jewish father and a Catholic Québécoise mother, this child expands the North African Jewish community of Quebec who number more than 18,000 people. As an adult, this child might become Jewish and Québécois at the same time."³⁵ The film cut to black-and-white archival footage of looting in the streets. A voiceover narration explained: "North Africa. Morocco, 1956. The end of French colonial domination, the first year of Independence." Words and images painted a brief history of Moroccan Jewry, beginning with their first migration from Jerusalem after the destruction of the First Temple (586 B.C.E) and the later migration of Sephardic Jews exiled from Spain and Portugal in the 15th century. The conquest of Islam in the 7th century imposed the dhimmi, second-class status on Jews and Christians living under Muslim rule. French colonization in the 20th century liberated Moroccan Jews from this status, but forced them to de-Judaize in order to Westernize. The narration continued: "Just as they were affirming their new role, the creation of Israel and the rise of Arab nationalism made it impossible to be Jewish and Arab at the same time." Archival footage showed a soldier shooting a Moroccan man who then collapsed into his tent. "And so, the Jewish communities of the Maghreb with roots there over 2000 years disappeared. Over the past 20 years, more than half a million francophone Jews left North Africa for France, Israel and Quebec."³⁶ Bensimon's documentary drew on the complicated histories of colonialism and decolonial national independence movements as integral frameworks for making sense of the experiences of Moroccan Jews in Montreal.

Scholarship on Moroccan Jews in Canada often appears in French-language publications or international journals rather than in the work of Canadian Jewish Studies, revealing a gap in writing about Sephardic Jews in Canada.³⁷ Bensimon's film is an important artefact for Canadian Jewish Studies because it exposes the unique experiences of Francophone Sephardic Jews in Canada to broader publics who may not have easy access to French-language scholarly publications. An analysis of two scenes from *20 ans après* demonstrates different forms of Moroccan Jewish activism in Montreal and their relation to local and international contexts. The first is a cross-cut sequence of talking-head interviews with Jean-Claude Lasry, the President of the Association Sépharade Francophone (ASF), and Manny Batshaw, Executive Director of the Allied Jewish Community Services (AJCS).³⁸ The sequence documented Montreal's unique brand of Sephardic activism born of tensions between English and French Quebec and sustained by Canadian multicultural policy and Quebec

Francophonie.³⁹ The second scene shows a conflict among Sephardim: Moroccan Israelis in Montreal protesting the Israeli government's treatment of Sephardic Jews at a Congress of the Canadian Sephardi Federation. This group was linked with the burgeoning protest movements of Mizrahim in Israel in the 1970s (which included its own Black Panthers, modelled after the African American movement) fighting against second-class treatment of Jews from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East by the Ashkenazi leadership of the State.⁴⁰ Both the ASF and MERI, the Montreal organization fighting for the rights of Mizrahim in Israel (MERI means "rebellion" in Hebrew), reflected the linguistic, national, and cultural contexts in Quebec as well as their relation to global postcolonial political and intellectual movements – some fighting for decolonization through national independence, others through socialism, communism, or civil rights.

The organizing activities of Moroccan Jews featured prominently in *20 ans après* through the work of the ASF, the predecessor to today's Communauté Sépharade unifiée de Québec. The ASF existed from 1966 to 1976 with the mission to support French-speaking Jewish immigrants integrate into Quebec through the creation of a French-language Jewish school and a community centre to support their unique religious, cultural, and social needs. As spokesperson for the ASF, Lasry declared:

I have had two attitudes vis-à-vis the Jewish community. The first is an attitude of revolt, rebellion...sentiments of frustration, of explosion. And then there is another attitude that has developed. An attitude perhaps due to my grey hair, more accommodating: I try, I think, to see the problems in a more general way, now that we are closer to a dialogue on the part of the Anglophone community, with the Anglophone community. Notably on the subject of a community centre..."⁴¹

Manny Batshaw, representing the leadership of the Anglophone Ashkenazi Jewish community, responded to the Moroccans' demands for cultural autonomy in a disparaging tone: "We now have a confrontation in regards to one aspect of service. Many of the Sephardim represented by an elite leadership propose that there should be a separate community centre for Sephardi youth and adults. We have to ask: is this in the best interest of both the Sephardim and the general Jewish community?" To this, Bensimon interjected from off camera: "but the Sephardim told you that it is in their best interest." The ASF were concerned that a gap was growing between Moroccan Jewish children and their parents. Forced to attend English Protestant schools under Quebec's confessional school system, intermarrying with Catholic Québécois, or facing assimilation into the Anglophone Ashkenazi community, Moroccan Jewish elders feared that the younger generation was losing its connection to the cultural traditions of their parents.⁴² As is revealed in *20 ans après*, some Moroccan Jewish students opted to drop out of school altogether because of language difficulties and

challenges of immigration and integration. Batshaw replied: “Yes, a leadership group has informed us. But to what extent is that leadership representative of all the Sephardim?” The irony here is that Batshaw himself is in the position of representing the entire Jewish community as director of the AJCS, while downplaying dissenting voices within the community he is supposed to serve. He later compared the loss of any Jews from the umbrella of the organized Jewish community to “a Holocaust,” revealing an anxiety of Ashkenazi Jewish leaders heightened in the aftermath of the Second World War and exaggerated by the conflict in the Middle East.

In fact, this exchange reflected the tensions inherent in each new wave of Jewish immigration to Montreal vis-à-vis the established Jewish community. Like Eastern European Jewish immigrants before them, North African Jews fought for cultural autonomy to preserve their unique forms of Jewish identity, language, and religious traditions. A significant difference for this population, however, was that Francophone Moroccan Jews migrated at the pivotal historical moment of the Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, with its rising national consciousness and shift toward the francization of government and business. As Francophones who shared elements of language and culture with Québécois, the cultural autonomy of this community posed a threat to the Ashkenazi Jewish community whose position as Anglophones in Quebec was weakening. Following the enactment of Bill 101 that made French the official language of Quebec in 1977, and the first sovereignty referendum of 1980, the Montreal Jewish population experienced a mass emigration of Anglophones, many of whom moved to Ontario. By featuring the activism of the ASF, Bensimon’s documentary displayed the important work of Moroccan Jews in Quebec, and the influence of local activism toward Sephardic Jews for French unilingualism. The ASF were quite successful in meeting the goals they outlined in their 1968 manifesto, itself steeped in the grammar of postcolonial dissent.⁴³ École Maïmonides, Montreal’s first Francophone Jewish school, was established in 1969, a Sephardic Rabbinate was created in 1978, as was the Département francophone of the YM-YWHA and Centre communautaire juif (CCJ).⁴⁴ Batshaw’s tone undermined the important work the ASF, but his questioning of the elite status of the group was also legitimate. The group, dominated by Francophone Moroccan men, did in fact homogenize the needs of a very diverse set of people.⁴⁵ “Sephardic,” deliberately chosen as an umbrella term by the ASF to refer to the history of Jews exiled by Spain and Portugal in the 15th century, failed to equally represent other groups who gathered under this label in Montreal such as Iraqi and Egyptian Jews who worshipped at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue but were not descendants from Spain and Portugal.⁴⁶ The ASF was also accused of undermining the differences among francophone Moroccans themselves by members of student group Hillel Francophone, particularly when the ASF transitioned into the Communauté Sepharade de Québec (CSQ) in 1976.⁴⁷

While the exchange between Lasry and Batshaw showed one aspect of Sephardic

activism vis-à-vis Ashkenazi Jews in Montreal, a scene towards the conclusion of *20 ans après* featured dissent amongst Francophone Moroccan Jews in Montreal over the treatment of Moroccan Jews by the Ashkenazi leadership of the State of Israel. Over archival images of Israel in the 1940s and 1950s, including the ma'abarot (notorious settlement camps), the narrator introduced the creation of the State of Israel and the conflict it created for North African Jews:

In 1948 the United Nations voted in favour of the creation of the State of Israel. And, in doing so, created another people without a homeland: The Palestinians. In this political context what would become of North African Jews? Zionist agents sought them out up into the confines of the Atlas Mountains, encouraging them to immigrate to Israel. Ironically, the Arab with whom they cohabited over centuries became the enemy. Still, today, in Israel, the Ashkenazi Jew remains the thinker, the governor, the master. The Sephardic Jew became his subordinate. A Euro-centric country was created in the Near East.⁴⁸

Bensimon used the language of decolonization, drawing on Mizrahi activism in Israel, and linking the displacement of Palestinians to that of the Arab Jews.⁴⁹ The following scene demonstrated how postcolonial dissent of Moroccan Jews crossed national borders from Israel to Canada. In a Montreal auditorium at a meeting of the Canadian Sephardic Federation, a man in a black jacket, an open-collar blue shirt, long black hair and a handlebar mustache, walked up to a microphone and announced to the Consul of Israel present at the meeting: "Monsieur, le consul d'Israël, I address you in the name of a group of Israeli citizens, residents of Canada..."⁵⁰ An anxious organizer urged him to be quiet and sit down: "You will not sabotage our congress... Mr. Mergui...Don't speak! Mr. Mergui..." The camera quickly panned to a table of representatives on the stage of the auditorium. Elias Malka (a businessman and one of the founders of the ASF) sat to the right of the speaker at the podium. The voice-over explained: "At the Congress of the Sephardic Federation, young Montreal Jews denounce the State of Israel as a just and equal country." The camera followed the protesters as they stood up in the crowd, walked towards the table of representatives to express their opinions. Malka, in tuxedo jacket and bow tie, took the microphone at the podium: "It is out of the question to ban anyone from speaking, especially Sephardic Jews who have issues to address."⁵¹ The scene cut to a close-up, talking-head interview of Raphael Mergui, a young, denim-clad sociology professor who explained:⁵²

MERI [the activist group he represented] wants to be independent from all established structures, of all known Jewish organizations. MERI, through its principles wants to demonstrate that the Jewish people are not a united people. We think that this is the domain of mythology, this is an ideolo-

gy that has always functioned, but we want to denounce at all costs and through concrete action that there is no unity between Jews, and that Jews are divided like any other people. There are Jews who are exploiting and Jews who are exploited. And we don't have to be allies with exploiters even if they are Jewish.⁵³

Mergui, as a representative of MERI, drew on Marxist-Leninist theory to interpret the situation of Mizrahi Jews in Israel in the 1970s. The camera cut back to Malka trying to calm down the crowd and bring order to the Congress. This scene may be taken from a different day because Malka now appeared wearing a beige suit and brown tie: "... There isn't one, or two or ten of us that create the law, it's the entire assembly... We fought to build this [Sephardic] Federation, we did what we could. If this evening there are other demands, I am for the demands and am here to change things..." The camera panned to the left of Malka to show Federation delegates behind a table with a protestor standing and arguing with one of them. The camera cut back to Malka as he continued to speak. The camera then revealed a group of young adults sitting in the front of the auditorium applauding Malka and chanting "bravo!" One wore a shirt proclaiming, "I AM SEPHARAD." But vocal protest drew the attention of the camera to the back of the room. Members of MERI, in suits, open-collar shirts, mustaches, and in a plume of smoke, hold up red cards and voiced their dissent, demanding they be given the right to address the assembly.

In reaction to these protests, the scene cut ahead to a medium, side-angle shot of Raphael Mergui, still in a jean shirt and now at the podium next to Malka, gesticulating with a thick cigar between his fingers: "How do you want Sephardic Jews in Israel to take responsibility and power as you said this morning, when here in Montreal you refuse that the Sephardi Federation become autonomous and you want to continue to be colonized by the establishment?" The camera cut to display the confused reaction of an older man in thick glasses and a kippah. The camera returned to a close-up of Mergui, framed, provocatively, with an Israel flag in the background. While pointing at the crowd with his cigar he continued:

And you, who wants Israel to free itself. I affirm that in taking these critical positions we are not dividing the Jewish people, I say that those who discriminate against the Jewish people are those who exploit their Jewish brothers, and not those that fight against those who exploit them. I'm asking you, in what world you can ask of the oppressed to unite with the oppressor, this is absolutely incredible... we'll unite, we'll unite when there is no more oppression and at this moment we will be proud that there is a united Jewish people, but don't come tell us stories! Our brothers are oppressed. Don't come tell them stories of unity with their oppressor. One last point: We are accused of playing to the game of antisemites: First, we are not paranoid, we

don't think the world is full of antisemites: there are antisemites of course, but the world is not one of antisemitic people, and how can you think that you can live in countries like Quebec and Canada and not work with the people among whom you live. Those are the people who isolate the Jewish community who create antisemitism or in any case nourish it because a true Jew, is a Jew that fights within Jewish organizations, but also participates in political and social life in their country and who works hand in hand with the people with whom they live.⁵⁴

This statement by Mergui explicitly linked the decolonial struggle of MERI in Montreal to struggles in both Quebec (which he calls a country) and by Mizrahi Jews in Israel. He challenged the claim that any criticism of Israel was antisemitic. Rather, he argued, the way to fight antisemitism was to participate actively both within Jewish organizations and in the political and social lives of the environments in which Jews live.

Bensimon revealed his own criticism of the direction in which some forms of Sephardic activism in Montreal eventually led. The concluding voiceover narration of the film lamented:

MERI of course, never won their cause. The Sephardic Jewish community neither. Twenty years after the arrival of the first migrant, the community remains detached from the Anglophone Jewish community and became poorly integrated in Quebec (which is concerned more with affirming itself) ...Even though they had the chance to claim their autonomy, the North African Jewish community dissolved the ASF to reinstate itself under the economic tutelage of Anglophone Jews... becoming the 22nd agency of the ACJS. Of all the bad options they chose the best, to live in French amongst the Anglophones.

Radical activism lost ground and was subsumed into the umbrella of the established Jewish Anglophone Ashkenazi community after 1976. The onscreen exchange between Elias Malka and Raphael Mergui was striking, however, in both its content and style. Like in *Occupation*, conflict was given cinematic space to work itself out.⁵⁵ Despite his disagreement, Malka insisted on letting Mergui, indeed all Sephardim, be heard despite one's radical position. Bensimon insisted on representing dissenting Sephardic Jewish voices together in his film, or as Edward Said might put it, contrapuntally: "[a]s we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts."⁵⁶ As such, viewers today looking back on the conflict in the 1970s can learn about the diversity of Sephardic activism, indeed Canadian Jewish activism in the 1970s, and its connections to local and global politics of postcolonial dissent.

Viewers today have the NFB Screening Room (www.nfb.ca) to thank for making these rare artefacts of Quebec Jewish arts and activism in the 1960s and 1970s online and free to access. Bill Reid's *Occupation* and Jacques Bensimon *20 ans après* represent a diverse set of Jewish radical politics of this period. Black Power, Labour, and French unilingualism were just some of the mass movements that influenced the politics of political science students at McGill University, the Association Sépharade Franco-phonie, and MERI. These films demonstrate the extent to which, by the late 1960s, Jewishness in Quebec was no longer isolated between two Anglophone Protestant and Francophone Catholic solitudes. Instead, diverse Jewish individuals and groups crossed language, political, intellectual, and national borders to make sense of themselves and their place in a radically changing world.

1

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2

Philip Lewis, "Ninth Floor Strikes Archival Gold," *NFB/blog* March 26, 2015. <http://blog.nfb.ca/blog/2015/03/26/ninth-floor-strikes-archival-gold/>

3

Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

4

Rebecca Margolis, "Sholem Shtern: Bridging the Gaps," in *New Readings of Yiddish Montreal*, eds. Pierre Anctil, Norman Ravvin, Sherry Simon. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007), 98. The early use of the term appears in: Gerald Tulchinsky, "The Third Solitude: A.M. Klein's Jewish Montreal, 1910-1950," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 19.2 (1984): 96-112; Michael Brown, *Jew or Juif? Jews, French-Canadians, and Anglo-Canadians, 1759-1914* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1987); and Michael Greenstein, *Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

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Roderick MacLeod and Mary Anne Poutanen, *A Meeting of the People: School Boards and Protestant Communities in Quebec, 1801-1998* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); David Fraser, *"Honorary Protestants": The Jewish School Question in Montreal, 1867-1997* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

6

From the writer A.M. Klein to the labour organizer Lea Roback, there is a long tradition of individuals crossing the "divided city." Sherry Simon, *Translating Montreal: Episode in the Life of a Divided City* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

7

"Poli sci students dissatisfied," *McGill Daily* 58, Sept. 27, 1968, 3. *Archive.org*. <https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-mcgill-daily-v58-n002-september-27-1968-11359>; Eric Andrew-Gee and Christina Colizza, "An Oral History of the 1968 Political Science Student Strike," *McGill Daily* Apr. 4, 2013. <http://www.mcgilldaily.com/2013/04/an-oral-history-of-the-1968-political-science-student-strike/>.

8

Andrew-Gee and Colizza "Political Science Student Strike."

9

Frank Furedi, Allan Herscovici, Harry Edel and Zeno Santiago are named as the executive elected to negotiate with the faculty. "PoliSci Association Issues Manifesto."; Andrew-Gee and Colizza "Political Science Student Strike."

10

David Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex and Security in Sixties Montreal* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013).

11

Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker and Ezra Winton, (eds.), *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

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D.H. Fortier, B. Petry, and T. Ford, "To Know and to be Known: The Report of the Task Force on Government Information. A Report Submitted to Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada Aug. 29, 1969. Cited in Peter K. Wiesner, "Media for the People: The Canadian Experiments with Film and Video in Community Development," (1992) in Waugh et al. *Challenge for Change*, 75.

13

Wiesner, "Media for the People", 76.

14

Harold Troper, *The Defining Decade: Identity, Politics and the Canadian Jewish Community in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 43.

15

Occupation. Directed by Bill Reid. Canada: National Film Board, 1970: 12:09-15:03.

16

Michele Byers and Stephanie Tara Schwartz, "Theorizing Multicultural Jewish Identity in Canada," *Critical Inquiries: A Reader in the Study of Canada* in eds. Lynn Caldwell, Darryl Leroux and Carrienne Leung, (Black Point, NS and Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood, 2013), 71-83.

17

"Meeting of the Senate of McGill University Council Room, eight floor of Leacock Building 3:10pm. A Student's Guide to People and Personalities. Compiled by the editors of the McGill Daily." *McGill Daily* 58.24 October 31, 1968, 6.

18

Nella Edel, "Perfect metaphor for Baron Byng," *The Suburban* June 6, 2016. http://www.thesuburban.com/opinion/letters_to_editor/perfect-metaphor-for-baron-byng/article_27e826aa-7294-58d4-a817-af610f0989d7.html

19

"Meeting of the Senate of McGill University" 6.

20

Occupation, 16:41-17:47.

21

NUSAS was a liberal anti-communist, anti-apartheid student organization. After the Sharpeville Massacre, Shingler fled South Africa to become the Liberal Party's representative in Europe. Karen M. Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal: The Inside Story of the CIA's Secret Campaign to Enroll American Student in the Crusade Against Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 265-266.

22

Waller stated: "The essential demand was that students have parity in all aspects of department decision-making. Which meant everything from curriculum to tenure decisions to hiring and so forth. And here I was, a young assistant professor, who had no power, and now the students want to take away half of the power. So I wasn't sympathetic to that at all..." Andrew-Gee and Colizza "Political Science Student Strike."

23

Occupation, 35:58-36:24. Han Suyin delivered three Beatty Lectures at McGill on October 22, 24 and 29 1968 published in Han Suyin, *Asia Today: Two Outlooks*. Beatty Memorial Lectures (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1969).

24

She was a PhD student at the time and later became Director of the Munk School for Global Affairs at the University of Toronto.

25

Ibid., 37:36-38:34.

26

Ibid., 40:58-43:18.

27

Herscovici became an advocate in favour of the fur trade, his father's family business, and against animal rights activists. Alan Herscovici, *The Truth About Fur Blog*. <http://www.truthaboutfur.com/blog/author/alan-herscovici/>

28

Occupation, 43:30-44:47.

29

Tom Perlmutter, "Beatty Lecturer: Dr. Han Suyin Delivers Shock Treatments," *McGill Reporter* 1.9. Nov. 18, (1968): 4-5. *Archive.org*. <https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-mcgill-reporter-v01-n009-november-18-1968-14619>.

30

Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*.

31

Troper, *The Defining Decade*.

32

Bronwyn Chester, "McGill français and Quebec Society," *McGill Reporter*, April 8, 1999. <http://reporter-archive.mcgill.ca/Rep/r3114/francais.html>.

33

Christabelle Sethna, "The Evolution of the *Birth Control Handbook*: From Student Peer-Education Manual to Feminist Self-Empowerment Text, 1968-1975," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 23.1 (2006): 70.

34

Mills, *The Empire Within*, 10-11.

35

20 an après. Directed by Jacques Bensimon. Canada: National Film Board, 1977. 0:00-0:58. Quotes from the film that follow have been translated from the French by the author with the help of Antoine Burgard.

36

Ibid., 1:34-2:50.

37

Yolande Cohen and Stephanie Tara Schwartz, "Scholarship on Moroccan Jews in Canada: Multidisciplinary, Multilingual and Diasporic," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 50.3 (2016): 592-612.

38

The AJCS was responsible for allocating Jewish community funds to various services under the Jewish Federation system. This organization later became Federation CJA.

39

William F. S. Miles, "Between Ashkenaz and Québécois: Fifty Years of Francophone Sephardim in Montréal," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 16.1-2 (2012): 29-66.

40

On the history of the Israeli Black Panthers see: Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel, White Jews, Black Jews*, (Routledge: London, 2010); *The Black Panthers (in Israel) Speak*. Directed by Sami Shalom Chetrit and Eli Hamo, Münster: Mec Film, 2003.

41

20 ans après, 16:06-18:08.

42

Jean-Claude Lasry, "A Francophone Diaspora in Quebec," in *The Canadian Jewish Mosaic*, eds. Morton Weinfeld, William Shaffir, Irwin Cotler (Toronto: J. Wiley & Sons Canada, 1981), 221-240.

43

The ASF manifesto released on May 1 set out four goals: a French-language Jewish school, synagogue, community centre, and community action. A section called "our participation in community action" reads: "Our language is different, yet we are refused the right to be different ourselves. Even more, attempts are being made at present to change our personality. Nevertheless, our association will, as set out in its Charter, strive to play its rightful role in Canada and particularly in Quebec. Whether it will, to do so, be forced to leave the great Jewish community, with all the consequences that this would entail, is a question which must be decided." "Manifesto" Association Sépharade Francophone, 1968. Box Communauté Sépharade de Québec, Jewish Public Library Archives.

44

"James 'Cabri' Dahan," Museum of Jewish Montreal. <http://imjm.ca/location/1086>; "Département Francophone du YM-YWHA – Centre communautaire juif". Museum of Jewish Montreal. <http://imjm.ca/location/2404>

45

This legacy continued in that only one woman has held the presidency of the Communauté Sépharade de Québec. Yolande Cohen, "Migrations juives marocaines au Canada ou comment devient-on Sépharade?," in *Les Communautés juives de Montréal: Histoire et enjeux contemporains*, eds. Pierre Anctil and Ira Robinson (Québec: Septentrion 2010), 247.

46

Ibid, 243.

47

Notable is the publication of Hillel francophone which devoted editorials and satires voicing their dissent on this issue, including an opinion piece by Jacques Bensimon, "A vous de jouer!," *Journal du Centre Hillel* 5 (1977): 6-8.

48

20 ans après, 47:20-48:47.

49

On the Mizrahi activist movement in Israel see: Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: a Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29.1 (1999): 5-20.

50

The look of the man was reminiscent of characters in Israeli Burekas films, akin to American Blaxploitation films for Mizrahi Jews. Ella Shohat. *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* ((1989). New Edition. New York and London: I. B. Tauris, 2010.)); Bensimon, *20 ans après*, 48:48-49:00.

51

Ibid, 49:00-50:03.

52

A different Mergui than was mentioned earlier with the handlebar mustache.

53

20 ans après, 50:03-50:38.

54

Ibid, 51:35-53:56.

55

Compare a more recent NFB documentary *Discordia*, directed by Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal (2004) which depicted the violent protests at Concordia University against a talk scheduled by Benjamin Netanyahu. Dissent between Jewish students in favour and against the protest could not be negotiated in the same room as the conflict in *Occupation* and *20 ans après* were, which shows us how much the politics among Jews had intensified, especially on the question of Israel.

56

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 43.