

José Antonio Saco: An Early Critic of Anti-Semitism

En el actual estudio, leo una carta publicada por el intelectual cubano José Antonio Saco en 1829 al lado de las Réflexions sur la question juive (1946) de Jean-Paul Sartre, ya que encuentro que las tesis centrales de estos dos ensayos tienen varios puntos de contacto. El ensayo de Sartre y su recepción, por otra parte, ayudará a deslindar dónde la carta de Saco anticipa la teoría crítica de la raza que surge posteriormente y varios casos en los cuales, a pesar de su perspicacia, Saco se equivoca. Habiendo resumido estas intersecciones, adopto la intervención ética de Emmanuel Levinas y sugiero que fue la relación empírica de cara a cara del cubano con un judío en Nueva York lo que motivó su meditación abierta y no convencional sobre el odio hacia el judío; en otras palabras, además de enseñarle inglés, el tutor judío de Saco le enseñó que, como decía Levinas, "puede existir un yo que no sea un yo mismo".

Palabras clave: José Antonio Saco, antisemitismo, filosemitismo, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas

In this study, I read a letter published in 1829 by the Cuban intellectual José Antonio Saco alongside Jean-Paul Sartre's Réflexions sur la question juive (Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate; 1946) as I find that the central theses of these two essays have several points of contact. Sartre's essay and its reception will, moreover, help chart where Saco anticipates later critical race thinking and several instances, despite his insightfulness, where he misses the mark. Having summarized these intersections, I adopt Emmanuel Levinas's ethical intervention and suggest that it was the Cuban's empirical rapport de face à face (face-to-face relation) with the Jewish other in New York that encouraged his broad-minded and unconventional meditation on Jew hatred – in other words, that in addition to teaching him English, Saco's Jewish tutor taught him that, as Levinas put it, "a self [moi] can exist which is not a myself [moi-même]." ("Ethics" 9; also qtd. in Hutchens 52).

Keywords: José Antonio Saco, anti-Semitism, philo-Semitism, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas

Bernard Lazare's *L'antisemitisme, son histoire et ses causes* (*Anti-Semitism, its history and its causes*; 1894) is hailed as the first published examination of anti-Semitism (Judaken 16).¹ Yet, over half a century prior, José Antonio Saco – who would later become one of the most influential Cuban statesmen, historians, and polemicists – embedded an analysis of the phenomenon of Jew hatred in his “El domingo en los Estados Unidos: Carta a un amigo publicada en el *Mensajero Semanal* del 21 de febrero de 1829.”² Framed as a response to a friend’s query about religious freedom and practice in the United States, where Saco had joined his mentor, Father Félix Varela, in exile, the Cuban intellectual begins by elaborating on the difference between “tolerancia religiosa” and “libertad absoluta”: “Una cosa es permitir sin castigar; pero imponiendo al mismo tiempo ciertas restricciones: y otra es dejar a la razón el libre ejercicio de sus derechos, sin coartarla bajo ningún pretexto” (“El domingo” 49).³ Great Britain would fall under the first category, Saco affirms, as it grants citizenship to non-Anglicans but still “oprime y tiraniza a unas [sectas religiosas] para favorecer y exaltar a otras” (“El domingo” 49-50). Across the Atlantic the second legal situation obtained, which the Cuban celebrates:

No es este el cuadro que presentan los Estados Unidos. La nación no reconoce secta predominante: el gobierno no puede establecerla, tampoco puede restringir ni favorecer alguna de las existentes: todas son iguales ante la ley; y en la omnímoda plenitud de sus derechos, el hombre rinde adoraciones a su Creador según los impulsos de su conciencia. Tal es la obra de las leyes en este suelo dichoso. (Saco, “El domingo” 50)

Public opinion concurs with law in the U.S., Saco continues, except when it comes to Jews. Whereas Christians of all denominations “gozan de una misma consideración social,” Jews do not: “mas no acontece así respecto de los judíos: ellos están degradados ante la opinión pública” (“El domingo” 50). Over the next few pages, Saco sketches an early and intriguing critique of anti-Semitism.

Conspicuously, the abundant critical scrutiny of Saco’s life and work, largely keen on his racial politics, has overlooked the letter presently studied. This is hardly surprising, even though it is included in his collected works and therefore easily accessed and certainly read. As Erin Graff Zivin notes, “While issues of racial, sexual, and economic difference have become central to debates on Latin American culture, both within the social sciences and the humanities, little has been written about representations of ‘Jewishness’ in the Latin American literary imaginary” (1). This exclusion results, in part, from the academy’s tendency toward disciplinary siloing. As

Brian Cheyette has persuasively argued, disciplinary boundaries mirror racial ones in cultural studies, which brings about the inadvertent upshot of reifying – rather than decoding and transcending – race thinking. It is in this way that, in Cheyette’s words, “theorists help to replicate the very oppositions that they are working against” (124). What is at stake, then, by leaving figurative Jewishness out of the discussion of race in Latin America goes well beyond recuperating a Cuban’s curious scrutiny of anti-Semitism. Ultimately, it involves challenging sites where racial configurations are naturalized. This study will therefore cut across disciplines in a prismatic appeal to students of both Latin American and Jewish culture and history to look beyond their traditional horizons in order to explore “what can no longer be regarded as discrepant histories assigned unproblematically to their various ethnic victims” (Gilroy 290).

Below, after introducing Saco and the grounds for his sojourn in New York City, I read the Cuban’s letter alongside Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Réflexions sur la question juive* (*Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*; 1946) as I find that the central theses of these two essays share several points of contact. Sartre’s essay and its reception will, moreover, help chart where Saco anticipates later critical race thinking and several instances where, despite his insightfulness, he misses the mark and reiterates racial discourses. Having summarized these intersections, I adopt Emmanuel Levinas’s ethical intervention and suggest that it was the Cuban’s empirical *rappor de face à face* (face-to-face relation) with his Jewish English tutor in New York that encouraged his broad-minded and unconventional meditation on Jew hatred. Levinas’s philosophical intervention will help shed light on how the Jewish Other, in addition to teaching Saco English, taught him that “a self can exist which is not a myself” (Levinas, “Ethics and Spirit” 9; also qtd. in Hutchens 52).

Even as I examine Saco’s “El domingo en los Estados Unidos” in the light of Sartre’s *Réflexions*, it is important to keep in mind that the forms and uses of anti-Semitism that were operative in mid-nineteenth century United States and in mid-twentieth century France, respectively, were not one and the same. As the critical race theorist David Theo Goldberg has argued, “there is no generic racism, only historically specific racisms, each with their own sociotemporally specific causes” (90). Still, there are compelling similarities between the phenomena diagnosed in the two studies as well as between the inquiries themselves. One of the more noticeable correspondences is that both assessments run against the tide of their time’s racial reasoning. Michel Rybalka situates Sartre’s *Réflexions* “in the French context of fall 1944:”

The war was still going on, the knowledge about the Nazi camps was still sketchy, and the prospect of the creation of the State of Israel still remote. Above all, swept up in the euphoria that immediately followed the Liberation, one was committed to being optimistic and preferred to put aside dark items such as the deportation and extermination of the Jews. It was to counter this neglect and indifference that Sartre decided to write his essay. (168)

Therefore, Rybalka contends, Sartre's *Réflexions* "was way ahead of public opinion" (162).⁴ The same could certainly be said of Saco's "El domingo en los Estados Unidos." Saco's report appeared within a social context where an anti-Jewish tropology had achieved discursive prominence (Silverstein 9). The industrial and the bourgeois revolutions were chief among a confluence of historical events that turned Cuban social structures on their head. Numerous texts from that era confirm that, from the chaos, the Jew emerged as an especially convenient psycho-social stabilizing device for many creoles. Let's look at one telling example of the Jew's position within the nineteenth-century Cuban imaginary that goes a long way toward establishing that Saco's take was uncommon. Esteban Pichardo y Tapia's *Diccionario provincial casi razonado de voces y frases cubanas*, the first dictionary to be published in the Americas, published in 1836 and reissued throughout the century (and this one, too, for that matter), codified this definition for judío: "La persona irreligiosa o desmoralizada, impía. El vulgo suele tambien llamar Judios por menosprecio a los Extrangeros [sic]" (216). Saco's short essay is remarkable, then, in both its originality and in its marked departure from late-colonial Cubans' standard conceptions of Jewishness. It also suggests that the project of constructing of Cubanness by Cuban intellectuals such as Saco took place in a dialogue that crossed borders of identity and nation; in short, it points to the complexity of the operations that forged Cubanía.⁵

JOSÉ ANTONIO SACO IN NEW YORK

Saco published "El domingo en los Estados Unidos" in *El Mensajero Semanal*, a newspaper based in New York which he edited alongside Félix Varela y Morales.⁶ Varela y Morales was a progressive Catholic priest who had taught philosophy at the influential Real Seminario de San Carlos y San Ambrosio in Havana. Several of his students, including Saco, came to form the renowned generation of creole liberal reformers whose project to delineate the contours of a Cuban identity gave birth to the island's literary tradition (Martínez Carmenate 72-76; Aguilera Manzano 99; Fischer 108). When Varela was elected deputy to the Spanish Cortes of 1822-23, Saco was tasked with instructing his absent professor's constitutional law course (McCadden

378; Opatrný 92). At the Cortes, Varela boldly argued for the gradual abolition of slavery and an autonomous government for the island (Corwin 37; Thomas 62; Martínez Carmenate 76, 93). Soon after, in 1823, Spain's liberal, constitutional government was ousted and King Ferdinand VII's absolutist monarchy restored (Martínez Carmenate 92-115). During the "Ominous Decade" that followed the "Liberal Triennium," the Bourbon king crushed his adversaries, beginning with the members of the Cortes that had moved to depose him. Varela, along with the two other Cuban deputies, escaped to New York (McCadden 379).

The colonial authorities appointed by Ferdinand implicated Saco through his association with Varela, leading him to flee the island and join his mentor in the United States (McCadden 379).⁷ Joseph McCadden summarizes Saco's journalistic activities during this period:

After the demise of *El Habanero*, Varela and Saco published from 7 Nassau Street, for Cuban readers, *El Mensajero Semanal* [sic], a compendium of world news and notes. Less radical than its predecessor, it carried on for three years, 1828-31, until it, too, ran afoul of the Spanish authorities. Then Saco returned to Havana and took over the editorship of *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, influential journal of the Economic Society. (388; for a summary of Saco's work with the *Mensajero Semanal*, see Opatrný 95-96)

From the pages of this magazine, Saco and his cohort of liberal intellectuals initiated their attack on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which has subsequently been celebrated for planting the seeds of Cuban abolitionism and independence. Appearing in the *Revista Bimestre*, Saco's "Análisis de una obra sobre el Brasil" (1832) levied the first condemnation of the slave trade to be published in the Spanish sugar island and served as the principal grounds for his second and permanent peripatetic exile. From Europe he would take part in all of the major debates and discussions touching on the pearl of the Antilles until his death in 1878.

"EL DOMINGO EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS" AND *RÉFLEXIONS SUR LA QUESTION JUIVE*

Returning now to the article published in *El Mensajero Semanal* in February of 1829, Saco contends that the only religious difference of any real significance in the United States is that between Christian and Jew:

Clasificando las religiones de este país por los principios fundamentales de su creencia, solamente se conocen dos, a saber la cristiana y la judía. Aquella se subdivide en católica, episcopal, bautista, cuácara [sic], presbiteriana, metodista y en otras muchas denominaciones; pero todas gozan de una misma consideración social

... mas no acontece así respecto de los judíos: ellos están degradados ante la opinión pública. ("El domingo" 50)

This observation is noteworthy on several counts. First, Saco documents the workings of a sort of religious alchemy, to adapt Matthew Frye Jacobson's metaphor regarding the processes whereby racial constructions are formed and transformed as their compositional elements fluctuate and interact. Jacobson traces the nineteenth- and twentieth-century migration patterns to and within the U.S. that "altered the nation's racial alchemy and redrew the dominant racial configuration along the strict, binary line of white and black, creating Caucasians where before had been so many Celts, Hebrews, Teutons, Mediterraneans, and Slavs" (14). This remaking of the racial paradigm whereby inclusion was granted to provisional whites was "profoundly dependent," Jacobson avers, "upon the racial exclusion of others," namely blacks (12). Consistent with Jacobson's thesis, Saco suggests that in U.S. American social conceptions the distinctions between "católica, episcopal, bautista, cuácara [sic], presbiteriana, metodista y muchas denominaciones" ("El domingo" 50) waned in importance compared to that between Christian and Jew, which saw an increase, and the dominant religio-racial configuration was redrawn along this "strict, binary line" (Jacobson 14).

Beyond detecting this transaction's alchemical properties, Saco intimates its symbolic and real differential remuneration politics, foreshadowing another fundamental discussion of critical race studies most famously explored by W. E. B. Du Bois. "It must be remembered," Du Bois asserts in *Black Reconstruction in America*, "that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage" (700). More recently, David Roediger has expanded upon Du Bois's thesis, that

the idea that the pleasures of whiteness could function as a "wage" for white workers. That is, status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships, North and South. White workers could, and did, define and accept their class positions by fashioning identities as "not slaves" and as "not Blacks." (13)

Without spelling it out, Saco hints that the "social consideration" that Christians of all denominations "enjoy" somehow hinges on the Jews' degradation; or to put it in Du Bois's and Roediger's terms, that Christians accrued "a sort of public and psychological wage" by fashioning identities as "not Jews."

In the first section of his *Réflexions sur la question juive*, written in October of 1944, Sartre discerns the same racial alchemy and wage in play in French anti-Semitism. In the chapter "Portrait of the Anti-Semite," the existentialist philosopher writes:

All they have to do is nourish a vengeful anger against the robbers of Israel and they feel at once in possession of the entire country. True Frenchmen, good Frenchmen are all equal, for each of them possesses for himself alone France whole and indivisible. (Sartre, *Anti-Semite* 26)

Later, Sartre elaborates further:

Anti-Semitism is not merely the joy of hating; it brings positive pleasures too. By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, I affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite. This elite, in contrast to those of modern times which are based on merit or labor, closely resembles an aristocracy of birth. There is nothing I have to do to merit my superiority, and neither can I lose it. It is given once and for all. It is a thing. (*Anti-Semite* 26-27)⁸

Thus, just as Saco tallies the "public and psychological wage" (Du Bois 700) exacted from the Jew by U.S. American Christians, Sartre does the same in terms of the Jew and French citizens of the "lower middle class" (Sartre 25).

Moving now from the similarities proposed by "El domingo en los Estados Unidos" and the *Réflexions* regarding the anti-Semite to those that deal with Jewish identity, it must be recognized that, as acute as Sartre's famous existential analysis of Jewish identity is, it takes him in some unsavoury directions. In the book's third chapter, Sartre studies the "inauthentic Jew":

In a word, the inauthentic Jews are men whom other men take for Jews and who have decided to run away from this insupportable situation. The result is that they display various types of behavior not all of which are present at the same time in the same person but each of which may be characterized as an *avenue of flight*. The anti-Semite by collecting and assembling all these distinct and often incompatible avenues of flight has traced out a monstrous portrait which is supposed to be that of the Jew in general; at the same time he explains these free efforts at escape from a painful situation as hereditary traits, engraved on the very body of Israel and, consequently, incapable of modification. (*Anti-Semite* 93)

To offer an example of the inauthentic Jew's behavioral traits that Sartre diagnoses as "*avenue[s] of flight*," he offers this explanation for "the Jew's special relationship to money":

Actually it is the power of purchase that appeals to him, and if he prefers this form of property to all others it is because it is universal. Appropriation by purchase does not depend on the race of the buyer; it does not vary with his idiosyncrasies. The price of the object is set in reference to any buyer, who is set apart only by the fact that he has the amount written on the ticket. And when that sum is paid, the buyer is legally proprietor of the object. Thus property by purchase is an abstract and universal form of proprietorship, in contrast to the singular and irrational ownership by participation. (*Anti-Semite* 126-27)

To the anti-Semite's irrational and particularist set of values, the inauthentic Jew's "defense reaction" is rationalism and universalism (Sartre, *Anti-Semite* 125). In the instance cited above, it takes the form of a "special relationship to money." This, then, is what Sartre means by his often misunderstood dictum that "it is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew" (*Anti-Semite* 69; see Misrahi 65). Sartre does not propose that the Jew is some sort of a "ghost others have made" ("Reflections" 44); or, as Jonathan Judaken puts it, "Antisemitism does not invent an imaginary, mythical Jew who masks the real Jew" (269). But rather, to quote a clarifying line from Sartre's biography of the writer Jean Genet, "We are not lumps of clay, and what is important is not what people make of us but what we ourselves make of what they have made us" (*Saint* 49).⁸ Robert Misrahi was among the first to amend Sartre's readers' miscalculations:

As for the characterized Jew, the inauthentic Jew, the Jew of "bad faith," according to *Being and Nothingness*, he was fabricated by the denial of what he construed as anti-Semitic accusations. "The gaze of the other" was anti-Semitism's judgment, but this regard could only be validated by the Jew himself, that is, by his flight. It was from this flight that the index of traits arose: accused of conspiracy and being foreign, the Jew replied with universal humanism; to the accusation of lewdness he replied with the denial of the body and spirituality; to the selective designation of scapegoat he replied with reflexivity and rationalism. In refusing to define himself by the other's reference, he became the negation of what the other affirmed in him. (66)

I shall not condemn the violence perpetrated by this "purely *negative* and derivative" representation of Jewish subjectivity that accepts the veracity of anti-Jewish canards (Traverso 80), nor do I plan to redress Sartre's uninformed assertions that, as Kirsteen Anderson summarizes, "Jews have

no history, share no religious bond other than a purely symbolic or ritualistic one, and lack a sense of community,” which others have done (61).⁹ However, it should be noted in passing that Sartre himself came to acknowledge the inaccuracies of his conception of Jewish identity (Sartre and Lévy 103; Misrahi 71; Judaken 235). More pressing for my purposes than condemning Sartre’s “felicitous misunderstanding” is to signal his enlightened disavowal of racial thought’s most basic assumption, that biology determines behavior (Misrahi 63; Goldberg 42).¹⁰

If Sartre discredits race thinking from the tragic moment the world witnessed one of its logical termini – Auschwitz –, Saco does so just as Western society came under its sway. To those that would deny that Jews are treated with contempt in the U.S., Saco finds readily observable evidence in Jewish impoverishment, in that Jews sometimes conceal their religion, and in the obsequious reception extended to those that visit Jewish houses of worship (“El domingo” 50-51). Having established the existence of prejudice in the United States, he then inquires rhetorically into its causes in a nation he found otherwise so admirable:

Pero si existe ese desprecio ¿cuál puede ser su causa en un pueblo de esta naturaleza? ¿en un pueblo tan tolerante así por sus leyes como por su educación? ¿provendrá de su corto número, puesto que los judíos acaso no llegan a seis mil en toda la república? No por cierto. ¿Provendrá de la bajeza de sentimientos que se les atribuye? Este es el motivo que se alega, y a la verdad que es bien poderoso para alejarlos del trato de toda persona bien educada. Pero esta será la causa de lo que hoy sucede, mas no de lo que ha sido, ni debido ser. (Saco, “El domingo” 51)

It is at this point that Saco identifies the self-fulfilling nature of anti-Semitism, anticipating Sartre and many others since:¹¹ “Yo creo, que examinando esta materia a la luz de una sana crítica, la degradación en que yacen, no es la causa sino el efecto de ese mismo desprecio con que se les persigue por todas partes” (“El domingo” 51). Noting that “Cuando se observa que sean cuales fueren los países en que habitan; que sean cuales fueren las instituciones de los gobiernos a cuya sombra viven; que sean cuales fueren las revoluciones que conmuevan el mundo político, los judíos siempre permanecen en la misma condición moral,” Saco argues that “menester es que exista una causa constante” (“El domingo” 51-52). And this constant cause is not Jewish nature: “Esas leyes que no los favorecen, esa opinión que los degrada, esas fueron las causas que conspiraron en su principio, y que trabajando de concierto, borrarón las ideas de honor, apagaron los nobles sentimientos, y hundieron en el polvo a una porción de la especie humana” (Saco, “El domingo” 52). Regrettably, Saco suggests that

this supposed immorality is somehow transmitted – whether by nature or nurture we are not told – to ensuing generations: “Reducidos a tan lamentable condición, así han pasado siglos y siglos, y trasmitiéndose el mal de padres a hijos y de éstos a sus descendientes, la sociedad se ve privada de muchos servicios que pudieran hacerle cuatro millones de hombres que sin patria vagan sobre la tierra” (“El domingo” 52). However, the more important point is that Saco denies that the Jews’ supposed immorality is essential to begin with, affirming instead that, as Sartre put it, “it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew” (*Anti-Semite* 69). Though Saco does not suggest any sort of flight behavior in the fashioning of Jewish identity, it is the anti-Semite that fixes the external limits on the Jews’ freedom of being-a-Jew, to borrow some of the terms that Sartre would later develop. And unfortunately also like Sartre, Saco’s representation of Jewish identity is negative and derivative, inattentive to Jewish history and culture.

SACO’S FACE TO FACE WITH THE JEWISH OTHER

Earlier, in establishing that anti-Jewish prejudice existed in the United States, Saco provides this anecdote:

Ahora recuerdo que cuando varios amigos y yo empezamos a practicar el inglés en Nueva York, buscamos un muchacho, para que nos leyese. El era judío, y nosotros lo ignorábamos. Llegado el primer sábado, no fue a nuestra casa a la hora de costumbre; mas después que salió de su sinagoga, se nos presentó diciéndonos, ‘que ya había llegado el caso de manifestarnos la verdad: que él era judío; y que así, tal vez nosotros no continuaríamos con él nuestras lecciones.’ ¿Habría hecho esta confesión, habría tenido esos temores, si hubiera pertenecido a alguna secta cristiana? [...] La conducta, pues, del muchacho judío prueba claramente, que ya él estaba penetrado desde tan tierna edad, del desprecio con que mira la opinión a los miembros de su clase. (“El domingo” 51)

I would like to speculate that Saco’s encounter with the Jewish boy went beyond proving to the Cuban that anti-Semitism was to be found in the U.S. – that perhaps it is what provoked his meditation on Jew-hatred. To think through this supposition, I will refer to Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy of alterity.

To review Levinas’s oeuvre here would prove exceedingly reductive, though I should offer a few introductory remarks. In *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961), Levinas’s first major book, he sets his thinking against what he calls the “imperialism of the same” in Western thought (87). “Philosophy is an egology,” Levinas affirms, “the primacy of the same ... marks the direction of and defines the whole of Western philosophy” (44,

45).¹² Sartre's answer to *la question juive* is a case in point. Sartre outlines how the "authentic Jew" should be, in Levinas's terms, "integrated into a totality" (Levinas, *Totality* 80) by way of a "concrete liberalism" that it is the Christians' duty to provide: "... we must accept him. And if that acceptance is total and sincere, the result will be, first, to make easier the Jew's choice of authenticity, and then, bit by bit, to make possible, without violence and by the very course of history, that assimilation to which some would like to drive him by force" (Sartre, *Anti-Semite* 147). Against such hegemonic and solipsistic ontological and phenomenological preoccupations, Levinas's philosophical project seeks to avoid "destroying the radical alterity of the other" (Levinas, *Totality* 35-36; see Davis 25).

In his second major study, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (1974), Levinas challenges his reader to rethink "the philosophical privilege of being," asking her: "Is the question of existence or non-existence the ultimate question?" (19, 94). For Levinas the answer is no. There is something prior, fundamental to being – the encounter between self and other, or ethics: "Being and cognition together signify in the proximity of the other and in a certain modality of my responsibility for the other, this response preceding any question, this saying before the said" (Levinas, *Otherwise* 26).¹³ In this quote, Levinas rehearses the crux of the argument that he continuously fleshed out over much of the last century. Levinas affirms that one's being and cognition are predicated upon a relationship with the other, who calls its freedom into question, causing the self to reflect and gain moral consciousness. If this holds true and I owe my very subjectivity to the other, how deep must my responsibility to her run? How imperative is it that I respect her and treat her justly? Levinas's response: my responsibility to the other is "unlimited" (*Otherwise* 10). This is why Levinas exalts the linguistic relationship for, in welcoming the other's attendance, it is non-subsumptive:

In effect, the being who speaks to me and to whom I respond or whom I interrogate does not offer himself to me, does not *give* himself so that I could assume this manifestation, measure it to my own interiority, and receive it as come from myself. Vision operates in this manner, totally impossible in discourse. For vision is essentially an adequation of exteriority with interiority: in it exteriority is reabsorbed in the contemplative soul and, as an *adequate idea*, revealed to be a priori, the result of a *Sinngebung*. The exteriority of discourse cannot be converted into interiority. The interlocutor can have no place in an inwardness; he is forever outside. (*Totality* 295)

The “saying” in proximity with the other is the locus of the subject’s constitution, of justice, and of transcendence (Levinas, *Otherwise* 5-7).

Above, I indicated that anti-Jewish tropes were frequently deployed in nineteenth-century Cuban identity construction projects. Yet, as notional Jews overswarmed the island, empirical Jews went almost entirely missing from it; Margalit Bejarano has written of the “absence of [a] Jewish presence” in Cuba until the turn of the twentieth century (116). If this seems paradoxical, Zygmunt Bauman has shown that anti-Semitism can thrive and may even achieve more virulence in communities devoid of a factual referent (real Jews) against which to weigh stereotypes (78). This is not to say that anti-Semitism cannot live side by side with Jews – history proves otherwise. In his survey of the logics of racism, the critical race theorist David Theo Goldberg discusses how, by way of confirmation bias, racist stereotypes can and do persist in the face of contravening experiential observation: “Where available evidence conflicts with their stereotypes, racists may be led to distort the evidence – via selection, accentuation, and interpretation – and thereby to corroborate the applicability of the stereotype at issue” (126).¹⁴ It is not my argument, therefore, that the intersubjective relation is the answer to racism – just that in this one instance it may have been.

Whereas for many Cubans the Jew had “acquire[d] a meaning [as] a question of the ego” – as a counterfoil against which the contours of Cubanness were delineated – Saco’s face-to-face with the Jewish boy commands him to rethink “The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions” (Levinas, *Otherwise* 60; Levinas, *Totality* 43). It should be recognized that the relationship between Saco and his tutor, an empirical encounter between an ego and a non-ego, is quite different from what Levinas maps, which is something more ancient – “the ‘prehistory’ of the ego,” the approach between self and other by which the ego is formed (Levinas, *Otherwise* 129).¹⁵ Still, I find that Levinasian ethics provide an instructive framework for thinking about Saco’s curious appeal for justice for U.S. American Jews, while “El domingo en los Estados Unidos” is an apt metaphor for the French philosopher’s reversal of how we approach the other’s difference.

“Who then came to wound the subject, so that he should expose his thoughts or expose himself in his saying?” Levinas asks (*Otherwise* 84). For Saco, it is his Jewish tutor: “No se me oculta que él podría tener alguna prevención contra nosotros por considerarnos intolerantes, pues que este es el sello que generalmente llevamos los católicos” (“El domingo” 51). Saco wonders if the boy’s absence is what Levinas might call a “wordless accusation” (*Otherwise* 127). The Cuban is wounded, accused, interrogated.

Now conscious of the violence perpetrated by notional Jewishness – the “intolerant ... seal that us Catholics generally wear,” he seeks to “do justice to the radical otherness of the other person” in the way that he best knew how – by penning an essay (Cohen xii). If Levinas denounces the written word as an expression of the said, of thematization and rhetoric, Graff Zivin has persuasively argued that it is “one’s duty as [Levinas’s] reader, as his student, to misread him, to be ungrateful, to misunderstand,” and consequently holds that in some instances it is “possible to ‘hear’ the face of the Other within the context of the *written* word” (22, emphasis in the original). I would like to suggest that this is one of those instances.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Saco becomes “concerned about justice because,” for what may be the first time, “the other has a face” (Levinas, “The Paradox” 170). In his relationship to the Jewish other, the intentional relation gives way to speech in which the other is present and “ceaselessly undoing the equivocation of his own image” (Levinas, *Totality* 204). To be sure, there is a teaching at work here beyond the ethical responsibility between self and other that inheres in the pre-original relationship that intrigues Levinas and enters the terrain of deontological and virtue ethics. Such instruction is surely warranted, for Western philosophy has traditionally understood “‘assimilation’ of the other [as] an activity which is constitutive of the I,” and so even philosemitic answers to “the Jewish question,” such as Sartre’s *Réflexions*, violently and unjustly seek to master alterity (Kosky 5; Anderson 68-69). Saco’s “El domingo en los Estados Unidos” is an exception. It is perplexing that, as broad minded as Saco shows himself to be with the Jewish Other in New York, he never awakened to his obligation toward the Afro-Cuban population, which he regularly assailed to further the social, political, and economic interests of the white creole middle and upper classes.¹⁶ This has to do with the different, but certainly not mutually exclusive, ways in which Jewishness and blackness served to shore up notions of Cubanness in the mid-nineteenth century.

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NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Anne-Marie Schultz, Paul Carron, Lenore Wright, and the anonymous readers at *RCEH* for their intelligent readings of this study.
- 2 I have modernized spelling to improve readability.

- 3 It should be recalled that in England the Corporation Act (1661) and the Test Act (1673) barred non-Anglicans from holding public office until the same year that Saco's essay was published. Russell Blackford explains that "By the late eighteenth century, high-achieving dissenters were seeking the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, closely watched by co-religionists in America. The attempted repeal was opposed successfully by conservatives, most notably Edmund Burke, who saw religion as a solemn responsibility of the secular ruler. The statutes were not finally repealed until 1829" (52). Still, Jews were not permitted membership in Parliament until 1866 when the words "upon the true faith of a Christian" were struck from the oath of office (Todd 250-51).
- 4 Joseph Sungolowsky also comments on the priority of Sartre's study: "Sartre is probably among the first to have brought the Jewish question to the attention of the public in an article entitled 'Portrait de l'antisémite,' published in *Les Temps Modernes* of December 1945, when the flames of the crematories had barely been extinguished" (68).
- 5 Anna Brickhouse writes of the "extended cultural dialogue between the United States and other sites, from Mexico City to Havana to Port-au-Prince" (9).
- 6 For a short biography of Varela, see Opatrný (56-58).
- 7 "Trasladéme en 1824 a los Estados Unidos de América, donde a la sazón se hallaba refugiado nuestro digno ex-diputado con sus dos dignos compañeros, y trasladéme por vía de paseo, como lo hicieron, lo habían hecho, y lo hacen infinitos habaneros" (José Antonio Saco, "Representación de Don José Antonio Saco al Exmo. Señor Gobernador y Capitán General Don Miguel Tacón" qtd. in Opatrný 93n32).
- 8 Sandy Petrey offers these observations on the passage: "*Anti-Semite and Jew* represents French anti-Semites as capitalizing on the fact that the manifest inequalities among them have no divisive effect for the very good reason that such distinctions remain invisible. What allows all anti-Semites to feel they're the same when they're so different? Their conviction that the only serious difference is between Frenchmen and Jews, which makes differences among Frenchmen not worth thinking about: "True Frenchmen, good Frenchmen, are all equal, for each of them possesses for himself alone France whole and indivisible" (125).
- 9 Misrahi summarizes the anti-Jewish stereotypes that Sartre reproduces: "reflective behavior (pp. 94; 114); rationalism (pp. 111; 134); denial of the body (pp. 119; 144); lack of tact (pp. 124; 150); a special relation to money (pp. 126; 153); basic doubling of sensibility (pp. 130-31; 159); nonmetaphysical disquietude (pp. 133; 162)" (65). Misrahi concludes: "It appeared that Sartre, in attempting to describe the psychological genesis (the central thesis of *Being and Nothingness*) of the Jewish being, had taken as verity what anti-Semites said about Jews" (66). Some of Sartre's readers that have discussed his essay's

shortcomings in this regard are Susan Suleiman, Pierre Birnbaum, Enzo Traverso, and Kirsteen Anderson.

- 10 Sartre writes, "Failing to determine the Jew by his race, shall we define him by his religion or by the existence of a strictly Israelite national community?" (*Anti-Semite and Jew* 64). Denis Hollier interprets: "Granted: no Jewish gestalt can be accounted for by internal analysis. But what does this prove? Simply that Jewishness is not an internal but a differential attribute. The failure of the anti-Semite's synthesis is no reason to retreat to the analytical line. There is a Jewish synthetic identity, yet it is not to be found in the Jew but in his situation: in his being-in-the-world (pp. 67-90; 81-109). It is neither biological, nor theological; it is existential. There is no Jewish (essential) gestalt but a Jewish (existential) situation" (151-52).
- 11 To cite a couple of examples, Benzion Netanyahu has argued that "Inquisitional persecution was responsible for the rise of a movement of Marrano 'return'" (926); Martin A. Cohen suggests the same: "De este modo los bulos siniestros anti-conversos se volvieron profecías que se autosatisfacían" (27).
- 12 As Colin Davis puts it, "philosophy is an egology, asserting the primacy of the self, the Same, the subject or Being. The Other is acknowledged only in order to be suppressed or possessed; as in the workings of the Hegelian dialectic, the characteristic gesture of philosophy is to acknowledge the Other in order to incorporate it within the expanding circles of the Same" (40).
- 13 Elsewhere Levinas writes that "being is produced in producing itself before the others in discourse; it is what it reveals of itself to the others, but while participating in, attending, its revelation" (*Totality* 253).
- 14 Thanks to Paul Carron for his help identifying this cognitive pattern.
- 15 "These are not events that happen to an empirical ego, that is, to an ego already posited and fully identified, as a trial that would lead it to being more conscious of itself, and make it more apt to put itself in the place of others. What we are here calling oneself, or the other in the same, where inspiration arouses respiration, the very pneuma of the psyche, precedes this empirical order, which is a part of being, of the universe, of the State, and is already conditioned in a system" (Levinas, *Otherwise* 115-16).
- 16 See Moreno Fraginals, for example, who writes: "Respecto a los negros, los hacendados cubanos y Saco tenían en común el miedo, la aversión y la seguridad absoluta de que no eran parte integrante de la nación" (43).

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