

Praise for *Suffering as Identity*:

"The triumph of mourning, Esther Benbassa warns us, stifles the breath of life. How can we fail to agree?"

Régis Debray, *Le Nouvel Observateur*

"This work is remarkable for its erudition and salutary non-conformism."

Le Monde diplomatique

"A magnificent plea for a Judaism of the future which would no longer have – or no longer solely have – 'suffering as identity' and Israeli politics as its instruments of redemption."

Politis

Reaching from biblical times to the present day, Esther Benbassa's prize-winning exploration of Jewish identity is both epic and comprehensive. She shows how in the Jewish world, the representation and ritualization of suffering has shaped the history of both the people and the religion.

Benbassa argues that the nineteenth century gave rise to a Jewish "lachrymose" historiography, and that Jewish history was increasingly seen to be a "valley of tears"—a development that has become even more dominant since the Holocaust.

The treatment of the Holocaust in the State of Israel now has the form of a civil religion. In principle within reach of everyone, the "duty of memory" and the uniqueness of the genocide have mitigated for many Jews the loss of other traditions. Every time Israel perceives a threat to its existence, the memory of the Holocaust is invoked—ensuring that suffering continues to be a central part of Jewish identity, and also positions the State of Israel as a redemptive force.

Esther Benbassa is Professor of Modern Jewish History at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sorbonne) in Paris. She is the author of many books, including, in English, *History of Sephardic Jewry*, *The Jews of France. A History from Antiquity to the Present*, *Israël, the Impossible Land*, *The Jews and their Future. A Conversation on Jewish Identities* and *The Jew and the Other*.

ISBN: 978-1-84467-404-6



History/Jewish Studies



www.versobooks.com
\$24.95/£14.99/ \$31.00 CAN

Front Cover: Brancusi, "La Souffrance" © The Art Institute of Chicago
Cover design by Sam Combes

Esther Benbassa

Suffering as Identity



Esther Benbassa

Suffering as Identity

The Jewish Paradigm



Winner of the 2008 Guizot Prize of the Académie française