

## 15 How One Becomes a Traitor

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Within the memory of the Jewish people, the military chief and historian Flavius Josephus stands out as the archetypal traitor.<sup>1</sup> He took part in the Jewish revolt against Rome that began in 66 AD. When his camp was besieged, he betrayed his fellows and surrendered to Vespasian. From the Roman side, he witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. He abjured neither his faith nor his God, yet remained loyal to Rome. His betrayal led Jews to consign him to forgetfulness, which was most unfortunate, both for him and for the Jewish people, deprived thereby of his brilliant insights into the period. His writings in Greek became part of Christian culture, to be introduced to Jews only nine hundred years later, in a Hebrew adaptation published in Italy in the tenth century.

When does one become a traitor? And in whose eyes is one a traitor? Betrayal resides more in others' perception of one's actions than in the actions themselves. Anything and everything can be subsumed into the category of betrayal, in accordance with the point of view taken. The act of betrayal can be the failure to make good on a promise, the breaking off of a friendship, the postponement of an encounter. Certain moments are more favorable than others to accusations of betrayal. They occur particularly often in difficult or unusual times. Were the Jews who left Spain in order to avoid betraying the religion of their forebearers better than those who converted to Christianity in order not to leave behind their country, their language, their occupations, their positions of status? Who decides what constitutes betrayal? Is it the historians who, supposedly objective, place on the good or bad side those actors who make decisions in accordance with their understanding of the necessities of the moment, the particulars of their own cases and their states of mind? The impossibility of reconstructing an entire period in the past leaves to memory, and then to history, the right to decide who were the good or bad guys.

At all moments of crisis, factions of Jews have fought against other factions of Jews. One cannot forget the Sabbatean heresy of the seventeenth century that almost entirely undermined rabbinical authority throughout the Diaspora. Sabbatai Tsvi, known to subsequent eras as a false messiah,

provoked a veritable religious cataclysm, a wave of conversions to Islam and Christianity. Those on the losing side have often been condemned by history as having been on the wrong side. Let us remember as well the battles waged by Hasidim, adherents of a mass mystical movement that caused a scandal within the eighteenth-century rabbinical establishment. Didn't their opponents, the *mitnagdim*, denounce them to the Russian authorities as undesirables and heretics?

With the onset of modernity, Jews who wished to leave the ghetto to partake of Emancipation were fought by followers of tradition. Supporters of the Jewish Enlightenment were especially targeted. Were German-Jewish soldiers in World War I, whose bullets may have hit their coreligionists on the other side, traitors unbeknownst to themselves? Memory of the Second World War is still so vivid that we are hard-pressed to decide whether those who sat on Jewish councils in the ghettos were traitors or unwilling tools of a hostile order.

### ISRAEL, THE DIASPORA, GENOCIDE

The founding of Israel constitutes the major turning point in the history of Jews since the destruction of the Second Temple. On the one hand are those who live in the Jewish state, and on the other, those who remain in the Diaspora despite the Zionist aspiration to gather all exiles onto that land. The gap is great between enthusiasm about Israel, the sense of security it affords, and actual emigration there. Supporting Israel does not preclude loving the country one continues to inhabit, its language, its culture, its climate, as one enjoys the comforts it offers.

Zionism, whose birth coincided with the proliferation of nationalist movements in Europe, reinforced in its adherents a Jewish identity that had started to falter in the modern era. It represented the attempt by a minority of Jews to take their fate into their own hands, at a time when modern Europe showed itself incapable of defending them against pogroms in Russia and restrictive measures in societies where they had lived for centuries. Post-World War II mythology posits an unbreakable link between the extermination of the Jews and the founding of the state of Israel, downplaying the role of Zionism from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.

The state of Israel was supposed to undo Jewish history in the Diaspora, as it created a new Jew, the modern-day Hebrew, the Israeli. "Denial of the Exile," which was, in a sense, a betrayal of a centuries-old Jewish identity, was a part of Israeli mentality for several decades before giving way to a more pragmatic view. Israel exists thanks in part to the support of the Diaspora, just as the Jews of the Diaspora gain ever more spiritual sustenance from their links to Israel. An exchange of favors takes place, whereby the Diaspora is gratified emotionally and Israel's basic interests are furthered, since Diaspora Jews are excellent promoters of Israeli policies.

Moreover, Diaspora Jews feel somewhat like traitors to the Zionist cause. Not having settled in Israel, they are afflicted by a sense of guilt that they assuage by moral and especially financial support. For Israelis, this has been a marriage of reason, reinforced by the Six-Day War and the occupation of the Palestinian territories. And Diaspora Jews get to project all kinds of fantasies on a people and a country that seldom correspond to the actual situation of a nation at war ever since its inception, living in rather difficult conditions.

The extermination and suffering of Europe's Jews that preceded the founding of Israel, endowed the country with an almost sacred kind of untouchability. Still, how could one disregard that it was born on land inhabited by another people? It was the biblical, and thus mythical, homeland of the Jews; and an ancestral, actual homeland for the Palestinians. The latter experienced the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 as a kind of repetition of what they went through in 1948. The Israelis too replayed the primal scene of the birth of their nation. As Israel was to be perceived as a land for Jews after the genocide, in 1967 the specter of Auschwitz was invoked to justify its new borders. Such reasoning was hammered in further by the right-wing Likud, when it came to power in 1977.

That was when memory of genocide started to emerge more fully not only among Jews but throughout the West. Constant invocation of the Holocaust served to restore Jewish identity in the Diaspora, especially among secularists, before it assumed a major political function both in the Diaspora and in Israel. Such considerations have nothing to do with the real pain and legitimate mourning undergone by survivors. Clearly, no a priori political calculations went into their attempts to convey their experiences and urge all sectors of society to be vigilant lest comparable atrocities occur. Nonetheless, one must carefully distinguish between actual endeavors to recount the traumas lived through and the way those traumas are instrumentalized, even if some strategies overlap.

#### “THE SHOAH AS RELIGION”

On September 11, 2000, an article of mine entitled “The Shoah as Religion” was published in the newspaper *Libération*. The problem I raised is not taboo in American or Israeli universities, where it is debated openly. The last few decades have seen the Holocaust transformed into a sacred cult with its ceremonies, its monuments, its commemoration days, its temples (the museums dedicated to it) and its high priests. I was so imprudent as to question the uniqueness of the Holocaust, arguing that no genocide is unique: our times have seen enough of them both before and after the Holocaust, and anything that is human is not essentially unique in the sense that it can occur again. This viewpoint enjoys a wide consensus in the scholarly world, with a few exceptions. It certainly does not deny the singularity of

each genocide, bound to its historical context and the methods employed. Nonetheless, the aim pursued in each case was the extermination of a group defined in “rational” terms by those programming the operation.

Imagine my surprise when I was attacked by droves of journalists, mouthing the opinions of the high priests of the Holocaust! The criticisms did *not* come from individual survivors or their organizations. By describing the process of sacralization, I had broached a topic that only the guardians of the temple and their spokespeople had the right to discuss. In a country like France, which does not clearly distinguish among intellectuals, amateurs and journalists, the media will provide an outlet to anyone, qualified or not, proclaiming a supposedly eternal truth. However, to question dominant opinion is akin to committing sacrilege.

The first thing held against me was that I had said something politically unacceptable. Indeed, to trace the evolution undergone by the memory of the Holocaust involves saying that the Holocaust does not escape manipulation and that it has been used to reinforce the ever-weakening identity of secularized Jews. Moreover, considering the Holocaust from the same perspective as other genocides places it within long-term history and gives back its fundamentally human—although deeply tragic—dimension. In the opinion of the self-proclaimed guardians of memory, such contextualization brings the Holocaust into competition with other genocides, something unthinkable because of the supposed uniqueness and unspeakability of the event. But if something cannot be spoken, doesn't that mean that memory of it cannot be transmitted? By pushing the argument to its logical consequences, one ends up advocating the opposite of what is sought by all those who expend incalculable efforts to prevent forgetfulness.

Jewish community institutions generally, and in France particularly, are known for their unconditional support of Israel, whatever be its government at the moment. They have consistently gone along with the politicization of the Holocaust that the Likud undertook upon its accession to power. The aura of holiness surrounding the Holocaust and the unassailable victimhood of Jews that follows from it de-legitimize from the start any criticism of the state of Israel, which has been elevated from the real plane to the symbolic. Those who take it upon themselves to criticize Israel have to pay the consequences, except on university campuses that remain on the margins of everyday society—as they do in the United States, but not in France. Such an aura of holiness is quite useful, sheltering the state of Israel no matter what it does to the Palestinians.

Though this arrangement does not always function perfectly, it achieves its aim of parrying the gravest criticisms of Israel. Everyone has to bow before the tyrannical memory of the Holocaust and the requirement to show unswerving support for Israel. Anyone not following this line had better beware; especially if he isn't Jewish, he may be called an anti-Semite at any moment. Such an accusation is anathema in these times when contrition for acts committed against minorities is all the rage. Yielding to the

ukases on memory, the West as a whole has sought to purify itself of its crimes, including the one committed against the Jews. It is almost unthinkable to advocate the dose of forgetfulness necessary for life to go on, and to urge transmission of a more positively defined Jewish identity.

In February 2008, at the well-publicized annual dinner sponsored by the CRIF (the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions)—to which most high-profile French politicians are invited—French President Nicolas Sarkozy made a startling proposal. He urged assigning to every French primary school pupil the responsibility of remembering a particular Jewish child deported from France and killed in a Nazi camp. This suggestion brought about a general wave of opposition among the French population, Jews included. For example, just one day after Sarkozy made his proposal, the well-respected former cabinet minister Simone Veil, herself an Auschwitz survivor, declared her opposition to this initiative, which she called counterproductive. Later, the commission that formed to examine the proposal rejected it. This incident, I hope, will cause people to think more carefully about Holocaust remembrance. It is as though public opinion were warning us that it had grown weary of being tyrannized by official memory.

Instead of accomplishing the difficult task of disseminating Jewish culture, various Jewish organizations and media have for decades preferred propagating the memory of genocide, especially useful for group cohesion. The Jews of North Africa, arriving in France after their native lands had become independent from the end of the fifties on, sought recognition from their Ashkenazic brethren, who regarded them with condescension. Thus they zealously partook of the memory of a genocide they had escaped, thanks to the fact that North Africa was liberated before France was. In North Africa, Jews had tended to be quite traditionalistic. However, in France, as the immigrant generation died out, religious practice declined among their descendents. They too felt the need for this identity based on suffering.

My article had thus touched several sore points; it was not long before my apprehensions proved justified. Few people had any illusions about these matters, but it was essential that all questioning remain within the community and not be aired in public. That was a problem I had not foreseen. I had written the article precisely to point out how the ubiquitous call for memory downplayed the dynamics of Jewish universalism. The risk was that generations to come would feel alienated from a Judaism defined by what had wrested vitality from it, and not by a future they could build by taking a distance from the past. I urged responsibility toward others rather than the cultivation of a memory that closed rather than opened horizons.

A few years later, in 2005, during the commemorations of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Simone Veil, president of the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah, would also speak of the need to strike a balance between the necessity of remembrance and the ethics of responsibility toward others. But we had not yet reached that point.

Whereas in the United States, Norman Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry*—though excessive, ideologically biased and far too personal—met only with severe criticism, in France, the author, the publisher of the translation, and Antoine de Gaudemar—the journalist for *Libération* who had reviewed it—were dragged into court by Gilles William Goldnadel. This commercial lawyer, head of an organization called *Attorneys without Borders*, has distinguished himself by the series of lawsuits he brings against those he accuses of anti-Semitism, by which he means criticism of Israeli policies. His favorite target is journalists, whom he attempts to silence by holding this threat over their heads. Of course, he ends up losing all these cases, but that hardly keeps him from embarking on new ones. This is the same man who, linked at one point with far-Right groups and now president of the Association France-Israël, published in November 2001 *Le nouveau bréviaire de la haine* [*The New Harvest of Hatred*].<sup>2</sup> In the midst of a French presidential campaign that fanned fear of street crime and resurgent anti-Semitism, the arrival of this work was hardly coincidental. It came right after 9/11, in the middle of the Intifada, at a point when approval of Israeli policies was at its lowest, as evidenced by public opinion polls and media coverage. The book is of no interest whatsoever except insofar as it plants fear in the minds of Jews. It would be followed by similar works, proudly displayed in the windows of bookshops.

#### DO JEWS HAVE A FUTURE?

Just a few days following September 11, 2001, appeared the book I wrote with Jean-Christophe Attias, *Les Juifs ont-ils un avenir?* [*Do the Jews Have a Future?*].<sup>3</sup> It was our bad luck to have finished it just before the terrorist attacks on the soil of the United States. The central role that the struggle against terrorism and the “axis of evil” would soon assume in the policies of the United States and the West in general quickly blurred the boundaries among the concepts “Muslim,” “anti-Semite,” “Islamic fundamentalist,” “terrorist” and “Palestinian.” This lumping together would become permanent in the heated state of public opinion—a heatedness understandable in the fright that took hold of the West, whose fragility had been driven home by the sight of an attack against its greatest power precisely where it seemed larger than life. Again, we must not forget that this was in the middle of the Second Intifada, and a kind of natural confusion formed between Palestinian terrorism and the acts that in a few minutes killed thousands of innocent victims and swept away the self-confidence of the United States.

The week it came out, our book was discussed in the magazine *Le Point*, by some intellectuals who couldn't have read it because they hadn't received it from the publisher. We were reproached for having downplayed anti-Semitism among Muslim Arabs in France. Perhaps, in fact, we had underestimated it. Nonetheless, in light of recent events, the issues of street crime

and anti-Semitic acts were rapidly woven into a *leitmotif* of the presidential race. Among our most virulent critics would be Bernard-Henri Lévy, and the future campaigner against the “new Judeophobia” Pierre-André Taguieff,<sup>4</sup> who in a kind of Moscow show trial questioned our status as scholars while paying little attention to the substance of our book. Let it be said in passing that just a few months earlier, the same B.-H. Lévy had, on the part of the Grasset publishing house, expressed great interest in my project for a book to be called *The Religion of the Shoah*. (For reasons not relevant here, I withdrew it from consideration by that publisher.)

Those who attacked my article on the Shoah a year earlier were the first to do the same to our book, which though cautious in its conclusions touched once again upon sensitive issues. A television debate followed, which pitted us against the official guardians of the memory of the Shoah: Serge Klarsfeld and his son Arno, as well as Claude Lanzmann. I had always respected their work, especially that of the two elders, but not what they had come to represent. My first mistake was to be seated next to a Palestinian, though I know neither how nor on what grounds I could have refused. Actually, only a few pages of the book dealt with the Holocaust, but they would be the only ones discussed, so much have Jews been identified with the genocide; what they accomplished before or after is of interest to very few, even among Jews themselves. It took a few minutes for me to figure as a foe of the Jewish people; since I spoke in such terms about the Shoah and happened to be seated next to a Palestinian, the association of ideas was quickly made. Neither Jean-Christophe Attias nor I, researchers working in relative calm, was used to the being in the limelight. We had gotten trapped.

What happened on television was just our first experience of the venom to be spewed upon us. The new political climate made it even easier for Jewish institutions to foster confusion between the struggle against anti-Semitism and the defense of Israel. French Jewry, immersed in the memory of the Shoah for years, would soon become ensnared in constant fear of anti-Semitism. Indeed, some sectors of the Jewish population faced it, especially those living in poor suburbs, victims of a climate of generalized, everyday violence. If anti-Semitism is appalling, so is the day-to-day racism directed at Arabs, Muslims and blacks. The second in no way excuses the first, but it has to be fought just as vigorously. But that was not part of the anti-street crime agenda of the politicians.

After September 11, it was no longer politically expedient to mention racism against Arabs and Muslims. And since politicians entertain various fantasies about Jewish power and the Jewish vote (there are some 530,000 Jews in France), it seemed useful to include the struggle against anti-Semitism as a theme in their campaigns. It was in these same circumstances that the shift rightward of French Jewry began. The left-wing government of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin was reproached for having lacked vigilance. Following our TV appearance, we were attacked verbally on the street by some of our Jewish brothers and sisters. Things having gotten rather

painful, we decided to take advantage of an offer to work at a research institute in Budapest, for a few months at least, thereby escaping passions whose depth we were just starting to grasp.

Our detractors felt an urgent necessity to get recalcitrant characters like us back into line, especially since we were Jews and held chairs in Jewish studies (I in Modern Jewish history at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, Sorbonne, and my husband in medieval Jewish thought at the same institution). Group solidarity was what mattered, and universalism was scuttled. The preference went to Jewish intellectuals totally attached to the “tribe.” If any resisted, name-calling and other intimidations made them quickly rejoin ranks. The task was completed through connections in the press. Ordinary Jews, plunged in a climate of fear, were only too glad to be offered scapegoats on whom to let out their frustrations.

Luckily, at this moment, we came across courageous journalists and publishers, intellectuals in the true sense of the word. Should anyone claim that real debate has died out in France, let it be known that there are spaces of free speech zealously and painfully guarded by some men and women of the Left and of the Right. Nonetheless, in such a case, one may feel immensely alone. One is seen as a traitor among the Jews, and regarded with suspicion by members of other groups, fearful lest they be seen as not thinking properly. One has been pasted with labels, and not the best ones. One begins to doubt oneself and one’s very thoughts. This is a crucial moment, when one might betray even oneself. More or less questionable characters come to offer support, not necessarily for the right reasons. One risks falling victim to their siren song.

Another danger is to assemble an in-group of victims of various kinds, a marginal cocooning strategy tempting to those who go against official doctrines. However, isn’t an intellectual supposed to be a vagabond, far from clannish interests, free *not* to belong? That’s no doubt a utopic desire, in these morose times. Besides, I have no calling for victimhood and did not feel so much persecuted as pressured. I resisted as well as I could, not without moments of weakness. Coming from a Sephardic family that held its honor and dignity above everything else, I was able to hide my dismay as I searched the better to understand and master the situation. Like a kind of Penelope in reverse, I rewove at night what others had undone during the day. Unsigned letters with obscene drawings arrived at my workplace; I received anonymous phone calls, threatening e-mails. Denigrating letters about me were sent to institutions where I had been invited to speak, in France and abroad.

Happily, our university positions did not depend on the Jewish community, but on the French state. If that had not been the case, we would have long been in deep trouble. Thus we were given the opportunity to measure the importance of something we, like others, often take for granted: the fact that our nation permits us as citizens to escape the pressures of our communities of origin, participation in which is a matter of choice

and always revocable. Colleagues where we taught chose to remain outside these community scuffles, and that redounds to their credit. Perhaps they simply did not get what all the fuss was about. Whatever the reasons for it, their silence was a source of comfort.

### EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE AT THE SAME TIME

I had thus been placed outside the community—I, who had never been quite inside it. The ambiguity of being inside and outside had always suited me, because of the distance and freedom that such a position offered. The symbolic expulsion to which I had been subjected had all the weightier a meaning. It reminded me of the excommunication that Jewish authorities could perform before the time of Emancipation, when Jews could not survive outside the community. Such a severe penalty was rarely brought to bear; it functioned more as a threat encouraging obedience to commonly accepted rules and general adhesion to the group, since such norms did not have the force of law. I felt somewhat excommunicated, not without a vague sense of having actually committed a betrayal. I too had refused to follow the consensus adhered to by members of a group as diverse as they are dispersed, and by the media organs that mirror this consensus in a kind of solidarity with the group.

Does a traitor always know why he has become one? In any event, the effects of his betrayal make him realize its extent. Abroad, and especially in the United States, my works translated into English are recommended reading in Jewish studies courses; in Paris, fewer and fewer students of Jewish background were willing to have a renegade like me direct their dissertations. Actually, that was a stroke of luck, because they were soon replaced by others with a more professional attitude toward research, having passed state contests for jobs and already taught some years in lycées. They worked on Jewish subjects as they would have on any other, with a refreshing distance and levelheadedness, and without crises of conscience. They brought to bear the same interest they would have shown if the Mayas or the Cathars had been their object of study. Jewish history suddenly felt more universal, which was hardly to my displeasure. As far as auditors were concerned—and it's a longstanding tradition of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* to let in as many as possible—the Jews among them continued to quibble over every word and give their point of view on everything. After all, by being born Jewish, weren't they automatically conversant with the entirety of Jewish history, whether ancient, medieval or modern?

Thus it became more prudent to give up speaking at Jewish centers where my listeners gleefully rewrote history as they liked, to conform to the circumstances of the moment. If I dared present certain proven historical facts, I was met with a barrage of insults and recriminations. For example, no one would listen if I pointed out that the Arabs had not expelled the Jews at

the time of the decolonization of North Africa. I tried to explain that Jews had to leave these new states because they had not, for the most part, been involved in the national movements that led to independence (indeed Jews were not always welcome in those movements). I recalled that Jews had been on the side of the colonizers from whom they expected improvement of their status, and that the birth of the state of Israel had poisoned their relations with the other natives. All that could simply not be heard. Before or after my appearances, vituperative articles would appear in the Jewish press, and radio programs would slam me.

A kind of force pushed me into a marginal space where I did not wish to be. I have never had any taste for small, conspiratorial groups. In my youth, I had been a Trotskyite for a brief time—less than a year, if my memory serves me correctly. I could not accept the partisan ideas, the division of the world into them and us. Inchoately I felt that if my comrades succeeded in changing the world, the new order would probably be even worse than the old one. In my native Turkey, I had grown up in a multilingual and multicultural universe, where various groups were not necessarily well-disposed to each other, but where they tried to act as though they were. As a matter of course, I came into contact with other cultures and languages. I was familiar with Islam as well as Christianity, not to mention Judaism, though we practiced it without great punctiliousness. Having circulated in such varied environs, I felt no desire for isolation. To be everywhere and nowhere at the same time has become a way of life for me; whether I've chosen it or not is no longer a question.

My "excommunication" freed me from a Jewish identity that would have suffocated me and cut off my contact with other groups—a hardly avoidable result of recent events and subsequent brainwashing that had affected a number of Jews, including the most open among them. At the age of fifteen I had moved to Israel, where most of my family lived, and studied there a few years. Israel was where I got rid of my inhibitions about being Jewish. In Turkey, after all, we had been a modernized kind of *dhimmi*, "protected" second-class subjects. We did not display our Jewishness openly; our first and last names made it clear enough. We were Jews, but not too Jewish in public, in order to avoid problems. We always feared the worse, even when there was no valid reason to do so. I was raised with the notion that one should learn several languages, in order to build one's life elsewhere. As a result, I don't know any language very well, though I speak quite a few passably.

In Israel, I had nothing to hide. I found the Israelis quite different from me. I was Jewish, and *they* Israeli. We did not share the same customs or culture. Slowly, I got over *that* exile as well. Though I did not become Israeli, the weight of being a Jew lightened; I sometimes wonder if that's what being an Israeli means. Some of my intellectual friends in Israel criticize the country's policies, back the Palestinians, make very subversive statements in the media, and they are not ostracized. That is no more

true after Gaza war Freedom of expression there was more developed than within the French Jewish community, which tracks every word you say and demonizes you as soon as you step out of line. I often go to Israel, where I have numerous familial and professional ties. There, no one has ever kept me from supporting the Palestinian cause, even if arguments can become quite intense. I have no problem with being Jewish and feeling profoundly close to Israel; nonetheless, I don't see Israel as the ultimate safety net.

In France I learned that as a Jew you may not criticize Israel, and that it is your duty to back it in all circumstances, even when its policies are wrongheaded and inhumane. Apparently, centuries of suffering, and genocide itself, have not made us more sensitive to others' afflictions. Israel is a country like any other, though it was founded by people who had suffered. Suffering doesn't make you any better. Worse: the stance of absolute victim, the supposed superiority of Jewish suffering, has immunized us against compassion. The suffering of the Palestinians is part and parcel of the existence of Israel. It's a country that belongs to two suffering peoples, who can't manage to share it equitably. They have their backs to each other right now; maybe in the future they'll work side by side. At least I hope so.

## INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

As the issue of anti-Semitism was becoming central in France, the defense of anything Israel did went without saying. While there were those who exploited fear of anti-Semitism in order to protect Israel's image, the majority of Jews were simply frightened. Instead of trying reasonably to deal with such a negative climate by working out strategies for groups to live together, those who had something to gain from fear fueled it with alarmist statements on TV and radio, while squelching any calls for calm and reconciliation. In the meantime, the community withdrew into itself. Anti-Semitism united a group whose members had long spread their efforts among universalist causes. At the same time, there reemerged an apprehension rooted in the past, which some sought to use for their own purposes, and anyone who tried to swim against the current was tyrannized. Journalists and politicians went along with this, lest they be branded anti-Semites. More and more Jews became radicalized, boxing the leadership into corners they had created for themselves.

Emotions reached a fever pitch, though they were occasionally dampened by reality, as when a young woman who claimed to have been the victim of an act of anti-Semitic aggression later revealed having made it all up, or when arson against the Sephardic social center on the rue Popincourt, attributed to Muslim Arabs, turned out to have been the work of a Jew. But there was a kind of confusion among Bush's campaign against the "axis of evil" (the finest moment of which has been the occupation of Iraq), anti-Arab sentiment among the native French (with its source in decolonization),

ordinary racism and the party line of the Jewish community leadership, who used emerging anti-Semitism to meet pressure put on it by Israel to increase emigration from France.

Even if one may argue that such phenomena have been exaggerated and the resultant fears exploited, it would be foolish to ignore the widespread identification of French Muslim Arabs with Palestinians, their strong resentment against Jews who have been more successful as a minority, and the resultant anti-Semitic attitudes and behaviors. Muslim Arabs, as well as sub-Saharan Africans, are outsiders insofar as they are targets of social and economic discrimination. That feeling is reinforced by the nearly complete absence of members of their groups among higher-ranking civil servants and political figures. They look at Jews as insiders, close to sources of power—as Jewish community leaders often claim to be, when they declare themselves to be "guardians of the values of the Republic." The hostility of outsiders toward power is directed in the first instance against those at the center, but also against those who are weak because they, too, are a minority: the Jews.

In this tense context I came to understand how the Holocaust and the creation of the state of Israel had slowly eroded the universalist outlook of Jewish intellectuals. Anyone who did not bow to community dictates and showed disagreement was a traitor. All means were employed to stifle dissent, even when they involved going outside the community. Well-formed relationships obviated the need to ask explicitly that articles by a certain scholar occasionally not be published, that his or her books not be reviewed, that he or she not be interviewed on radio or TV. Indeed, such petty rebuffs are not intolerable, but they foster malaise in those of us who exist professionally only when our work is noticed and our viewpoints elicit reactions.

Far-Right Jewish websites, whose content would cause shudders if it were not put up by Jews, have come to play an essential role in sullying reputations, branding certain individuals with the odious label "anti-Semite." It is easy to imagine breaking into a cold sweat as one ponders the possibility of such a fate. But do those who fear Jews like them? No one seems to be asking that basic question. Those who today pour vitriol on Islam, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism—which they roll into one thing—may tomorrow vent their wrath on the Jews, as happened at times of crisis in the unpredictably changing France of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In addition to the Jewish activists I have described, there arose, in 2003 and 2004, die-hard secularists, whose rhetoric is somewhat different. They claimed that the French Republic was endangered by some 1,500 Muslim schoolgirls wearing veils. The effects the girls' attire caused on the educational climate could have been dealt with serenely, without enacting a law, but we must not forget that secularism is the sole remaining issue capable of serving as a rallying point in France. The points of convergence between

the Jewish activists and the die-hard secularists are many. We are witnessing a “betrayal of the intellectuals” of the kind Julien Benda described so eloquently in the 1920s; in our times, it is the response to an identity crisis France is going through as it confronts various challenges: The expansion of European Union, globalization, obsolescence of its social programs, structural unemployment, uncontrollable ghettos on the fringes of its cities and the exhaustion of a culture that is no longer seen as a beacon of civilization. Our intellectuals are betraying their mission by promoting a vague nationalism that rejects Muslim Arabs and blacks.

### KEEP UP THE FIGHT?

Though the Palestinian cause has been transformed by some into an all-encompassing ideology, there are those who support it simply out of a desire for justice, thereby fulfilling their proper role as intellectuals and journalists. They do so, despite the strong temptation to adopt a reactionary position that would safeguard their tranquility and, occasionally, even their livelihood. Provocative stances have never been less appreciated than in these gloomy times. However, not all abdicate their responsibilities. History has shown many times that France has a conservative, reactionary streak. Nonetheless, it is also a birthplace of human rights and of many a struggle for freedom; that legacy has not been totally effaced.

Intellectuals covet the honors, great and small, that authorities bestow upon them. The fragility of their status makes them cross easily from one side—or from one extreme—to the other. That is a risk no one, and certainly not I, can be sure of escaping. Thus it is a cause both for gladness and regret that the power of intellectuals has been greatly eroded in this era of globalization, free markets and cyberspace. Nonetheless, in France, and especially within the limited parameters of its capital, their voices are occasionally heard; something remains of their erstwhile prestige, but their impact is no longer the same. The importance of in-groups among Parisian intellectuals cannot be discounted, whether the networks formed are the result of elective affinities or sheer cliquishness. In the provinces, concerns are light years away from the internecine struggles of the capital.

I am fortunate to be Jewish in that it spares me from being labeled an anti-Semite. I can be accused only of self-hatred. That term was used in the 1930s to describe Jews who had internalized anti-Semitism to the point of detesting their Jewish selves and occasionally even committing suicide. Naturally, I am far from any such attitude. But I am no less Jewish for asserting that Israel and the genocide do not constitute the bases of my Jewish identity. I urge filtering our sense of affliction so that it may be experienced in a positive way. For that reason, I believe that it is time to move from the cultivation of memory to the study of history. It seems to me that the essential lessons of the genocide can only be transmitted, once the

survivors are gone, by historians who will take a distance from the searing memory of those who went through it. It is historians who will secure a permanent place for that tragic event.

What remains of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain—one of the greatest traumas of medieval times, the witnesses to which have long disappeared—if not historical accounts of the period during which that catastrophic occurrence took place? By neutralizing the intense affect elicited by that tragedy, history has freed successive generations from its unbearable weight. This is hardly the same as forgetting the event; instead, history provides the continuity and fosters the creativity necessary for a constant renewal of Jewish existence.

If French Jewry shows less vitality than its American counterpart, one reason is that France demands conformity and centralization, while it mutes diversity. It is an urgent necessity to compose a new form of diasporic Jewish identity in this country, faithful to Israel but autonomous. That would be the only kind of Judaism capable of producing values relevant to today's world and responsibly engaged in it. Where are the heirs to the nineteenth-century Jews committed to Marxism, socialism and anarchism, who sought to change the world and, so doing, the Jewish condition? Where are Jewish musicians like the Gershwin brothers, so universalistic as to base their *Porgy and Bess* on the lives of African Americans? Where are those eager to follow in the footsteps of the American Jews who in the 1960s lent essential support to the black struggle for civil rights? Not only did the catastrophe of World War II make European Jews lose confidence in their countries; the current self-isolation of Jews here is symptomatic of a crisis caused by a focus on Israel and a refusal to stop mourning the genocide.

These patterns were all too evident following the torture and murder of a young Jew named Ilan Halimi in January 2006. It is most likely that his kidnapers assumed he was rich because he was Jewish, even though he had a modest job as a clerk. The trial of the persons accused of this murder began more than three years later, after a long inquiry, on April 29, 2009. And when the murder first became known, community officials, chastened by earlier false alarms, proceeded cautiously. But at the annual CRIF dinner shortly afterwards, government figures mentioned anti-Semitism as a motive for the murder, thereby prejudging results of an investigation then still in its early stages. The president of the CRIF took it from there. Emotions soon reached a climax among the rank and file of the Jewish community.

In an article published in *Le Monde* of February 25, 2006, I called for calm, urging that this crime not be interpreted primarily as an assault against the Jewish community. I was assailed by dozens of e-mails. Unfortunately, I focused more on negative reactions than on expressions of support from those like me, fearful of mass hysteria. Shaken by the frenzy, I censored my remarks to the media; no one was ready to listen to reason. The greatest alarmists were predicting an end to Jewish life in France.

There followed a mass demonstration against this crime, where Jews found themselves isolated, so far had they pushed an ethnocentric interpretation. This was a further sign of a turn inward that risks making the Jews of France foreigners in their own country, cutting them off from the nation as a whole. Far-Right activists under the tutelage of Philippe de Villiers joined the march—another symptom of the new political orientation of a community that had always tended to vote for the Left. Nowadays, Islamophobia has made the far Right an acceptable force. A few days later, someone of “French” origin (i.e., not Jewish, Muslim or black), met a fate similar to Ilan Halimi’s; no sooner had that happened than a Muslim Arab was killed at Oullins in what was probably a racist attack. None of these murders can be condoned, and it is certainly worthwhile to consider closely the causes of such recurrent violence emerging within French society. But neither of the latter two cases called forth mass demonstrations.

### THE LONG, DIFFICULT COMBAT FOR COEXISTENCE

In 2004, right in the middle of the Intifada, Jean-Christophe Attias and I organized a day of encounters at the Sorbonne, entitled “Jews and Muslims: Sharing History and Constructing Dialogue.” We wished to bring to the same podium scholars, media commentators and community activists who generally did no more than hurl invectives at each other. Our aims were to foster dialogue by delving into the factors that enabled members of our groups in the not-so-distant past to live together despite grave conflicts, and to see what elements could be reproduced of those earlier modes of coexistence. In the climate of anti-Jewish and anti-Arab sentiment, the event was somewhat defiant. We took up the gauntlet before some one thousand young and not so young people, assembled in the great lecture hall of the Sorbonne. Their reaction was positive, as was that of the media, a great number of whose representatives attended. Without falling into excessive optimism, it can be claimed that this gathering of concerned citizens began a process whereby tensions were reduced. Similar colloquia were organized by others, elsewhere. The proceedings of ours appeared in 2006.<sup>5</sup>

Encouraged by such an achievement, we spent the next two years organizing a week-long series of events to be called “Paris: The Wager of Coexistence.”<sup>6</sup> We scheduled panels, lectures, debates, concerts of world music and films. The municipality of Paris, other levels of government, private institutions, the media, various organizations, cooperative politicians from various parties—all worked together to produce a great success that lasted from March 19 to 26, 2006.

However, throughout our preparations, we came up against arrogance and indifference on the part of Jewish institutions, the Jewish press and radio, and dogmatic Jewish intellectuals. Fortunately, there were a few positive exceptions. However, the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah

denied us a grant because, no doubt, its officials would have preferred that they, rather than we, decide the speakers to be invited.<sup>7</sup>

Attempt at coexistence does not seem to be a priority. Everyone is in favor of living together, but it depends upon with whom. Certainly not with Muslim Arabs and blacks. And what’s the good of life together, since it just leads to assimilation. In fact, the implicit demand is that it’s for them to live with us, and not vice versa. This denotes the absence of any realistic strategy as well as the amateurism throughout all echelons of Jewish community leadership. This state of mind is only reinforced by the fact that they have the ear of many politicians, of whose support they consider themselves forever assured.

“Paris: The Wager of Coexistence” opened on March 19, 2006, a few days after publication of my article on Ilan Halimi. As a reprisal, many representatives of Jewish institutions who had finally agreed to take part, canceled on Friday, March 17, well aware that the series of events was beginning that Sunday. Though it was no doubt the result of a decision taken at a group level, this attempt at sabotage was not followed universally; a few Jews, more courageous and independent than others, stayed on the panels. The meeting rooms were packed for several days with hundreds of people of all religions, political tendencies, walks of life, and not just from Paris. Taboos on what could be said had fallen, a veritable place for free speech had been opened. Representatives of a great majority of media organs were there as well. So all was not lost; hope still existed that we were not condemned to hate one another forever.

On June 5, 2006, I published an article with François Burgat, calling for an end to the financial boycott by Israel and Europe that risked starving the Palestinian people. In this case, the first thing held against me was having coauthored a piece with a scholar at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) who had been accused of sympathy for Islamic fundamentalism. In fact, I did not meet him until after the appearance of the article. When he suggested we collaborate, we agreed on a number of common points, which certainly did not mean I approved of everything he had ever written. My second offense was to advocate suspension of the boycott after Hamas had been elected. I do not see why anyone would imagine I support terrorism because I urged that a people stop being punished for voting a certain way, when no consideration had been given to why they had done so. The war against the Hezbollah in July–August 2006 and the brutal attack against Gaza in December 2008–January 2009 will probably not change the situation. These offensives no doubt lead to a quagmire. One day, negotiations will become necessary among all those involved, including Hamas and Hezbollah, who will be forced to normalize, renounce terrorism and recognize Israel.

The article I wrote with Burgat earned me the labels “community-biased, antisecular, supportive of fundamentalism.” This was in a piece in the weekly *Marianne*, authored by Martine Gozlan, known for her irrational



positions on Islam. So now I was “community-biased,” without knowing for sure to what community I belong. I hope it is to the community of men and women who, despite the risk of occasional errors of judgment, hold dignity and freedom to be nonnegotiable and resist as much as possible caprices of the moment.

At the present time, some months after the Gaza War, and even if 95 percent of French Jews supposedly supported Israel in this war, I cannot but ask myself this question: How to be a Jew after Gaza? The general climate of confusion in France has given a new impulse, among some groups, to a combination of anti-Israeli sentiment and anti-Semitism. It is impossible not to be aware of this worrisome evolution. On April 6 and 7, 2009, during a conference I organized in Paris on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I realized how much more difficult it had become to discuss these issues. Yet, how can a Jew accept what happened in Gaza? And how can a Jew accept this transformation of anti-Israel hostility into hostility toward Jews as such? Perhaps a new path has to be opened toward a new way of being Jewish.

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#### NOTES

1. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “Flavius Josèphe ou du bon usage de la trahison” (“Flavius Josephus, or On the Proper Use of Treason”), introduction to the French translation by Pierre Savinel of Josephus’ *The Jewish War* as *La Guerre des Juifs* (Paris: Minuit, 1977). [Author’s note.]
2. Gilles William Goldnadel’s *Le nouveau bréviaire de la haine* (Paris: Ramsay 2001) references the title of Léon Poliakov’s *Le bréviaire de la haine* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1951), one of the first historical overviews of the Holocaust, translated into English as *The Harvest of Hate* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1954). [Translator’s note.]
3. Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias, *Les Juifs ont-ils un avenir?* (Paris: Lattès, 2001), soft cover ed. (Paris: Hachette, 2002). English translation: *The Jews and their Future: A Conversation on Jewish Identities* (London: Zed Books, 2004). [Author’s note.]
4. Pierre-André Taguieff’s *La nouvelle judéophobie* (*The New Judeophobia*; Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2002) was translated by Patrick Camiller as *Rising from the Muck: The New Anti-Semitism in Europe* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2004). [Translator’s note.]
5. Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias, ed., *Juifs et musulmans: une histoire partagée, un dialogue à construire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006). [Author’s note.]

6. In French, “Le Pari(s) du vivre-ensemble,” is a complicated play on words. *Paris* is, of course, the capital of France, but *pari* means “wager.” [Translator’s note.] In 2008, Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias organized a second edition of this event, focused on cultural diversity at school (see [www.parisduvivreensemble.org](http://www.parisduvivreensemble.org)). [Author’s note.]
7. In her e-mail of March 7, 2006, Anne-Marie Revcolevschi, director of the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah, put it this way: “Despite the objective of fostering coexistence, which we support wholeheartedly, the general composition of the panels seems to us to emphasize what separates the groups involved rather than what brings us together.” [Author’s note.]