

Historicity, Peoplehood, and Politics: Holocaust Talk in Twenty-First-Century France

KIMBERLY A. ARKIN

Anthropology, Boston University

In December 1997, the newly established Société d'histoire des juifs de Tunisie (Historical society for Jews from Tunisia, SHJT) hosted the first French Metropolitan commemoration of the 1942 Nazi *rafle* in Tunis, a round-up of more than five thousand Tunisian Jewish men for forced labor. Claude Nataf, the Tunisian-born historian responsible for creating the Société and the commemoration, explained the ritual by emphasizing the importance of both the *rafle* and its memorialization in the context of the larger story of the Nazi genocide. Noting that Tunisian Jews had long felt too “ashamed” vis-à-vis European Jewish suffering to tell their own story, Nataf argued that “the reality of this round-up, the only one outside of Europe, shows the universality of the Nazi genocidal project” (Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives 2011). In keeping with this understanding, the commemoration has been held at France’s *Mémorial de la Shoah* (Holocaust Memorial) in Paris since it opened in 2005. Over the years it has become an increasingly visible event, attracting a growing number of public dignitaries—the mayor of Paris, the head of French institutional Judaism—as well as serving as a platform for exhibits, lectures, and film screenings about North African Jewish experiences during the Second World War.

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The creation of such a commemoration is, at first glance, not surprising. In the French context, Nataf's innovation can be tied to a more general trend in the memorialization of the Shoah.¹ Beginning in the 1980s, French government practice created unprecedented public space for the expression of collective difference in France. As a result, after years of relative Jewish silence about, as well as French state denial of, the specifically *Jewish* dimension of Second World War suffering, public Holocaust commemorations increased dramatically in the 1980s and early 1990s (Conan and Rouso 1994; Mandel 2003; Rouso 1994; Wiewiora 1992; Wolf 2004). Of these new rituals, the 1993 creation of an annual Vel d'Hiv' commemoration, a ceremony marking the anniversary of the July 1942 *rafle* of almost thirteen thousand Paris-based Jews, presents an obvious model for and parallel to the memorialization of the Tunisian round-up.² Nataf's ceremony can also be understood within a larger framework of French (and European) identity politics and what is often called the *concurrence des victimes* (competition among victims) (Benbassa 2006; Blanchard, Lemaire, and Bancel 2006; Bonniol 2007; Chaumont 2010; Trigano 2006). Since at least the early 2000s, as popular and political tolerance for the relatively recent explosion of visible public difference has ebbed, much of France's public minority politics has taken the form of zero sum arguments about relative victimization. As I will illustrate more fully below, in a context of ever-greater public fear of certain forms of collective difference, evoking the Holocaust, whether metaphorically or historically, has become a way for both Jewish and non-Jewish minorities to attempt to establish a privileged and exclusive relationship to public sympathy and good will. Finally, Nataf's innovation is closely tied to global trends in Holocaust memory and memorialization. In Israel, where the Holocaust is part of a national narrative of Jewish identity, the children and grandchildren of North African immigrants have increasingly internalized the *Shoah* as part of their own sense of self and Jewishness (see Yablonka 2009).

But there is also much that remains surprising about the historical commemoration of the Tunis round-up as part and parcel of the Shoah. As we will see below, French Jews of North African origin, their children, and grandchildren hardly ever narrated their (sometimes horrific) Second World War experiences as part of the Holocaust. Although to varying degrees Vichy officials enacted and enforced discriminatory, anti-Jewish legislation in all three of France's North African territories, most notably Algeria, no mass deportations or systematic exterminations took place in the Francophone Maghreb. Several thousand North African and European Jews were sent to labor camps located in

¹ The Hebrew term *Shoah* is commonly used in French to refer to the Jewish genocide.

² Vel d'hiv' is an abbreviation of Velodrome d'Hiver, the name of the bicycle track in the fifteenth arrondissement where Jews were held until deported. The ceremony was initially authorized by President François Mitterrand and has since been attended by every sitting French president.

Algeria and Morocco, where some died of disease, malnutrition, or exposure. And the Nazis also briefly and brutally occupied Tunisia from late 1942 until early 1943. But only a handful of Tunisian Jews died and even fewer were executed during the occupation.³ In stark contrast, only a handful of the Jews deported from the Vel d'Hiv' survived. In fact, as I will show, making the Tunisian *rafle* the opening act of the Nazi Final Solution in North Africa requires assenting to a series of historical counterfactuals about what *would* have happened to North African Jews—mass deportations to Europe, the construction of local death camps, the murderous complicity of local Muslims—had the Allies not triumphed as quickly as they did. So there is a puzzle behind Nataf's ceremony and the scores of similar initiatives that have appeared in France over the last decade or so. Why are some French Jewish institutional elites like Nataf working against French Jewish memory and narrating Second World War-era North African Jewish experiences as part and parcel of the history of the Holocaust itself? How do these new narratives differ from the everyday ways that North African Jews talked and talk about their relationship to the Holocaust? And finally, how might attention to these different narratives help us understand contemporary French Jewish efforts to negotiate belonging at multiple sociological scales, namely as members of a global Jewish community, of European civilization, and of the French nation?

I will argue that Nataf's commemoration of the Tunis *rafle* is one prominent example of an intentional, perhaps even pedagogical attempt to reframe French Jewish and non-Jewish understandings of both history and the Holocaust. From at least the 1980s on, intra-Jewish arguments about the Holocaust—what it was, when it was, whom it impacted, and who could talk about it—produced either North African Jewish exclusion from European Jewishness or a free-floating, almost metaphorical understanding of the Holocaust itself. I will argue that post-2000, many French Jewish elites like Nataf found both of these options problematic. In a context in which French minority groups were increasingly ethnicized *and* denationalized because of that ethnicization, North African Jewish exclusion from the "European" Holocaust had become socially and politically intolerable to French Jewish elites focused on conjugating Jewishness and Frenchness or Europeaness. At the same time, the refraction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in France, and Europe more widely, made purely metaphorical understandings of the Holocaust—understandings that allowed the Shoah to be appropriated by both non-European Jews and non-Jews (including Palestinians)—politically abhorrent. As a result, Jewish elites like Nataf began encouraging French Jews to reframe how they talked,

³ For accounts of Jewish experiences in World War II-era Francophone North Africa, see Abitbol 1989; Boum 2014; Cherif 2011; Katz 2012; Kenbib 2014; Msellati 1999; Stein 2014; and Stora 2006. For an account of Metropolitan Jewish deportation and death rates, see Marrus and Paxton 1981.

felt, and thought about the Holocaust, a reframing that required rethinking the nature of time and causality itself.

Drawing on ethnographic data from the mid-2000s as well as accounts from French Jewish newspapers and magazines from the 1980s onward, I make this argument by tracing out two different ways that French Jews attempted to grapple with the relationship between North African Jewry and the “European” Holocaust before the late 1990s. I focus less on the narratives themselves than on the different understandings of causality and time—the historicities—that underlie and authorize them (see Trouillot 1995; Sahlins 1985). Loosely following Walter Benjamin (1974), who has famously written about the shape of time and the consequent relationships between pasts and presents, I call these two different historicities messianic and linear. As I will show, the narratives associated with these historicities produced angry clashes, which reified potentially threatening forms of internal Jewish difference, most notably “Sephardi” or “North African” Jewishness, on the one hand, and “Ashkenazi” or “European” Jewishness, on the other. These difficulties set the stage for the emergence of Nataf’s “pedagogical” historicity, a hybrid form that takes elements from both messianic and linear accounts while sidestepping the political and social impasses they produced. This new “pedagogical” historicity assumed and helped create a more expansive and homogenized “European” Jewishness, thus resituating all French Jews as part and parcel of an emergent, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim “Judeo-Christian” Europe.

In making this argument about the political and sociological shifts that have impacted French Jews over the last two decades and inspired new forms of Holocaust talk, I seek to contribute to two very different scholarly conversations. I will return to these contributions in the conclusion, but want to flag them here. One is the storied literature in anthropology and history on the ways that conceptions of time and causality define the sensibilities of particular groups (e.g., Anderson 2006; Evans-Pritchard 1969; Durkheim and Mauss 1967; Geertz 1973; Malkki 1995; Spiegel 2002; Yerushalami 1996). That literature, however, tends to assume that particular historicities produce and delimit particular groups, whether those groups are defined historically, ethno-culturally, or ethno-religiously. However, I will show that arguments about historicity are part and parcel of the construction of group identity and boundaries, not just artifacts of clearly established lines of difference. I am also speaking to anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists interested in the problem of pluralism in contemporary Europe (e.g., Asad 2003; 2006; Bowen 2007; 2009; Cesari 1998; 2014; Fernando 2014; Laurence and Vaisse 2005; Roy 2005). Many of these writers seem to assume that the negotiation of European pluralism is a problem that no longer applies to Jews, either because the Holocaust turned Jews into quintessential Europeans or because Jews have no real future in postmodern Europe (see Hammerschlag 2016). But I believe Nataf’s North African Shoah illustrates just how embroiled contemporary

French Jews continue to be in old/new questions of group difference and belonging in contemporary Europe.

JEWISH PLURALISM AND FRENCH HOMOGENEITY

The background for Nataf's pedagogical innovation, and in fact many intra-Jewish discussions of the Holocaust, is a crisis over what exactly it might mean to be a French or European Jew. This is a problem that dates back to at least the French Revolution and appeared in a variety of guises throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It revolved around two central issues: the coherence and "representability" of Jewishness itself vis-à-vis a state that modeled "religion" around Catholicism, and the subordination of Jewish belonging to French national identity.⁴ The latest round of these new/old questions about French Jewishness and Jewish Frenchness can be tied to French decolonization of North Africa. In the decades following the Second World War, as the French North African Empire crumbled, France became the preferred destination for almost all Algerian Jews and many Moroccan and Tunisian Jews. By the mid-1960s, such migration had more than doubled the postwar French Jewish population (Bensimon and Della Pergola 1984) and laid the groundwork for decades of disputes over communal leadership positions, prayer spaces, forms of religiosity, and politics (e.g., Arkin 2014; Davidson 2015; Poirier 1998; Podselver 1986). By the early 2000s, a study funded by the Fonds Social Juif Unifié (FSJU), the major Jewish philanthropic organization in France, estimated the total Jewish population in France at 500,000–575,000 people. For the first time since the 1960s, while slightly more than half of Jewish heads of household were still foreign-born, the majority of the total French Jewish population hailed from Metropolitan France (Cohen 2002). But while French Jews in the early 2000s were increasingly French, there are indications that they were also increasingly ethnically identified and divided. A 1988 demographic survey sponsored by the Fonds Social Juif Unifié found that 50 percent of Jews interviewed identified themselves as "Sephardi," 34 percent as "Ashkenazi" and 16 percent as "neither" (ibid.: 12). In a 2002 follow-up study, the number of Sephardim jumped to 70 percent; the number of Ashkenazim dropped to 24 percent, and 6 percent claimed to be both Sephardi and Ashkenazi (ibid.). In the years that separated the two studies, "neither" disappeared as a category, suggesting increased ethnic identification within Jewishness.

At the same time that "Ashkenazi"/"Sephardi" distinctions seemed to become *more* important to French Jews, the question of the "Europeanness"

⁴ On the question of Jewish plurality, as well as the problem of homogenized Jewish Frenchness from the Revolution through the 1980s, see Albert 1977; Birnbaum 2000; Gasquet 2016; Graetz 1996; Leff 2006; and Schechter 2003.

of Jews in France also became more urgent. This urgency came about indirectly, through turn-of-the-century French and European public engagement with the “Muslim question.” In the 1980s, under the socialist government of François Mitterrand, France had briefly experimented with the ethno-cultural pluralization of the public sphere, an experiment that the hard right quickly appropriated in its attempts to justify excluding France’s former colonial populations through reference to essential cultural differences (e.g., Silverstein 2004; Taguieff 2001). By the late 1990s and the early 2000s, faced with the specter of a global Islamic revival both the left and the right had firmly rejected multiculturalism as a model for *French* pluralism and instead started seeking to define and defend various understandings of core “French” identity. Thus the first decade of the 2000s saw raucous public debates about *laïcité* [secularism] and its role in creating a framework for everyday French life, as well as government-sponsored discussions about the contours and content of French national identity. All sorts of vastly divergent positions were taken during these debates (Bowen 2007), only some of which were explicitly anti-Muslim. But regardless of the complexity of these political positions, framing the conversation around the (im)possibility of Frenchness for Muslim “immigrants” born and raised in France helped ethnicize the French Republic itself.

If the ethnicization of the Republic worked to exclude “Muslims,” here understood in Naomi Davidson’s terms as racialized bearers of incommensurable religious differences (2012), it did so in ways that potentially threatened French Jews. As many scholars have noted, French public discourse about Muslims slipped constantly between religion and other geographical and cultural markers, namely Maghrebi origin and “Arab” ethno-cultural features (e.g., Fernando 2014; Hargreaves 1995; Tetreault 2015; Silverstein 2004). This slippage has allowed Islam and Muslims to be continuously ascribed extra-European origins and thus cultural realities, which were then used as explanations for supposed Muslim inassimilability (see Asad 2003). I have argued elsewhere that focusing on “extra-European” origins and attributes as a “problem” has the potential to threaten (some) Jews’ Frenchness (Arkin 2014). Over the past three decades, Jews of North African origin have become increasingly visible in ways that mirror religious, political, and cultural developments among Muslims of North African origin (Benayoun 1993; Podselver 1986). As a result, by the early 2000s, the division of French Jewry into “Ashkenazim” and “Sephardim,” meaning “Europeans” and “North Africans,” threatened to become more than just a fraught intra-Jewish issue. In a context where French Jews *could* be read as foreigners, the division of French Jewry into “Europeans” and “North Africans” was viewed by some as markedly pernicious and problematic (see Trigano 2003). And this is precisely the context in which some Jewish elites began rethinking the temporal and geographical frame of the Holocaust.

THE “EUROPEAN” HOLOCAUST AND FRENCH SEPHARDIM

Before delving into Nataf in the mid-2000s, I am going to flesh out some of the ways that French Jews have talked to each other about the Holocaust over the past thirty or so years. At least since the 1980s, the Holocaust has been a discursive site at which public battles around Jewish unity and difference have been fought.⁵ Given the significance of Holocaust experience for defining Europe as a cultural and political project (Bunzl 2004; 2007; Judt 1992) as well as European Jewishness, North African Jews’ relationship to it is both important and problematic. In everyday talk and in public discourse North African Jews have both connected themselves to and distanced themselves from what, for better or for worse, is typically imagined as a “European” event. “European” Jews have, in turn, often reacted angrily to all these attempts to situate North African Jews vis-à-vis the Shoah. Here I will analyze a few examples of these fraught intra-Jewish debates by drawing on newspaper accounts that pit “Ashkenazim” against “Sephardim” in a battle to define the Holocaust in temporal, geographical, and religious terms.

In August 2000, Ovadia Yossef, the former Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel and head of the right-wing Sephardi religious party Shas, made headlines in the French Jewish (and non-Jewish) press. Yossef had given a Sabbath sermon in which he explained that those who had been killed during the Shoah harbored the reincarnated spirits of the Jews who had helped build the golden calf (*Agence France Presse* 2000). This particular and deeply controversial theology has roots in medieval mystic Jewish thought about transmigration and reincarnation of especially sinful souls. It also is part of a long-standing attempt to explain the Holocaust within a Jewish theodicy that emphasizes divine punishment as a reaction to Jewish sin.⁶ But the comment sparked intense anger and discussion in Israel as part of an ethnicized reconfiguration of political and religious authority, one that pitted establishment Ashkenazim against second- and third-generation Mizrachim and Sephardim (Yablonka 2009). And it had similar repercussions in France. The French media immediately connected the Shas leaders’ comments to those that had been made by French Chief Rabbi Joseph Sitruk three years earlier in interviews with journalists (Sitruk 1997; Ternisien 2000). In those interviews, Sitruk tried to distance himself from a theology linking the Holocaust to divine punishment, while also

⁵ This has also been true in Israel (see Yablonka 2009).

⁶ As early as 1947, the Ashkenazi rabbi of Hasidei Sokolover-Kotsek in Tel Aviv, Hayim Yisrael Tsimmerman, offered just such an explanation of the Holocaust. According to Gershon Greenberg, “Tsimmerman ... invoked the sixteenth-century Kabbalist Hayim Vital’s notion that the souls of one generation could return to a later generation for punishment, and he averred that the Holocaust was the punishment for several earlier sinful generations” (Katz, Biderman, and Greenberg 2007: 13). Hayim Vital had drawn his arguments from Yitzak Luria, the sixteenth-century mystic, who explained that God made the souls of those who had committed grave sins in the Biblical past “transmigrate” to future generations that were destined for great punishment (ibid.: 165–66).

engaging with many of the premises of that theology, notably reincarnation and the terrible sin of Jewish assimilation in the nineteenth century (see Farhi 2000, quoted in Mopsik and Krygier 2014: n.p.). Summing up his ambivalent position, Sitruk said: “For our wise men, the explanation of the Holocaust resembles that of the smoker who is dying of cancer because he did not take care of his health. To follow the metaphor, I would tell you that Israel cannot die quietly in bed when Israel is no longer Israel” (ibid.).

Yossef’s comments therefore renewed public attention to Sitruk’s theodicy and resulted in some public tensions between more liberal French rabbis—notably the Parisian reform Rabbi Daniel Farhi and the Parisian Massorti rabbi Rivon Krygier—and Sitruk (Mopsik and Krygier 2014; Ternisien 2000). But the objections to Yossef and Sitruk were not simply theological. Sitruk, it should be noted, was only the second North African Jew to hold the position of French Chief Rabbi, and he, like Ovadia Yossef, was associated with an inflexible, anti-intellectual, and not very textually informed form of orthodoxy. The angry letters that followed the Yossef/Sitruk controversy therefore became an occasion for recriminations rooted not only in religious differences, but also in supposedly essential differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim. In a letter to the editor of the religious newspaper *Actualité Juive* about the controversy, Yvan Haggiag noted that Rabbis Yossef and Sitruk had simply told the “truth,” which was that God punished Jews who did not observe all His *mitzvoth* [commandments] and keep themselves “different” (Haggiag 2000: 4). Another *Actualité Juive* reader, Eric Jarville, reframed Haggiag’s religious/non-religious divide as an ethno-historical gap between Sephardim and Ashkenazim: “As a practicing Ashkenazi Jew, I deny all my Sephardi brothers the right to comment, evaluate, weigh, and most importantly judge this tragic part of our history. It is clear that only the Sephardi fringe allows itself to weigh in on the un-nameable, having no or very little familial experience (Salonica Jews excepted) with this black period. So pity on this issue, my Sephardi brothers, even more so if you think of yourself as religious: be silent, silent!” (Jarville 2000: 4). This incident was not the first time that religious theodicy around the Holocaust had become a topic of both secular and “Ashkenazi” displeasure. Ten years earlier, Charles Szlakmann, a contributor to *Actualité Juive*, had noted with concern Yiddish language activist Richard Marienstras’ admonition that Sephardim not talk about the Shoah “because it is in very bad taste for people whose communities were spared ... to give lessons about Judaism” (1990: 11). In other words, Marienstras clearly thought “Sephardim” who knew nothing about the Holocaust should keep their self-righteous theodicy to themselves.

What is going on in these bitter arguments over the Holocaust? And what, if anything, does it have to do with the relationship between historicity and the contours of Jewish community and belonging? Marienstras and Jarville certainly seem to have understood Yossef, Sitruk, and Haggiag’s accounts as

narrowing the scope of both the Holocaust and of Jewishness by writing some (mostly Sephardi) Jews out of the genocide on the grounds of their stricter piety and adherence to divine law. Indeed, instead of seeing the horrible hand of historical contingency behind the events of the Shoah, the rabbis seemed to see differential merit and divinely allocated retribution. Marienstras and Jarville, in turn, read this account of differential merit and retribution as a story about ontologically different *kinds* of Jews. They presumed that the rabbis saw differential divine favor mapping onto a European/North African divide, one that followed a division between religious and non-religious. And while Marienstras and Jarville denounced such a reading of divine favor, they themselves divided Jewishness along precisely those same lines, presuming that knowledge, authority, and even the right to speak about a major event in Jewish history came with seemingly continuous and heritable experience (Wright 2015) in relation to an exclusively European Holocaust. But while Marienstras and Jarville's presumption that a European/North African divide motivated both the rabbis' theology and its total illegitimacy, the rabbis' comments were in fact more complex than such a reading suggests.

The anger and incomprehension that Marienstras and Jarville brought to this conversation about theology and the Holocaust highlights an epistemic clash between their own understandings of Jewish temporality and locality and those invoked by the rabbis (Yerushalami 1996). For the rabbis just quoted, history does not appear to be a series of events connected by cause and effect in linear time. This rejection of linear cause and effect is most clear within a mystical framework of reincarnation, where sins committed by others hundreds if not thousands of years before result in devastating forms of divine retribution in the modern world. Punishing Jews who worshipped the golden calf by reincarnating them as Holocaust victims requires what Benedict Anderson, following Walter Benjamin, has called a "messianic" realm of simultaneity: "a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present" that is alien to linear and causal conceptions of history (Anderson 2006: 24). Even Sitruk's less mystical version of the Holocaust—in which God punishes (some) Jews collectively for sins committed (by others) in their lifetimes—conjures up relations of cause and effect that do not operate in a flat linear framework. Instead, Sitruk may be suggesting that contemporary Jewish experiences can only be made sense of through cyclical time—an endless cycle of sin, punishment, and redemption that requires the hidden but all-important hand of the timeless divine (Spiegel 2002; Yerushalami 1996). As a result, despite their differences, Yossef and Sitruk's stories rely on an appeal to a transcendent and perhaps even ahistorical/atemporal realm of divine will and justice—a kind of messianic time-outside-of-time and causality.

These messianic historicities conjure up forms of Jewish unity that Marienstras and Jarville may have found incomprehensible and perhaps unimaginable. In the 1970s and 1980s, Marienstras was one of the most famous French

advocates for what he called “diasporic” forms of Jewish identity, meaning non-state oriented, transnational and yet highly localized forms of Jewish difference. Marienstras argued that it was precisely these deeply local differences that allowed for Jewish survival by ensuring that Jews were not everywhere subjected to the same assimilatory pressures (1975: 15). Although Marienstras insisted that Jewish diasporas must “recognize one another among themselves” (ibid.: 16), his portrait of Jewish diaspora was rooted almost exclusively in an European imaginary and temporality, most notably Yiddish culture and the Holocaust. Marienstras’ writings thus produce somewhat incommensurable *local* Jewishnesses (Marienstras 1975; 2007). This is certainly evident in his understanding of conservative theological explanations of Holocaust as unwanted “Sephardi”—read North African—meddling in a sociocultural world from which they are historically and geographically excluded. For Marienstras and Jarville, the irreducibly local dimensions of Jewish experiences are embedded in linear historical continuities and are emphasized above and beyond transcendent Jewish unity. Moreover, such assumptions about geography and linear continuity do not just highlight preexisting fault lines; they actually help produce them. The linking of conservative theological grappling with the Holocaust to “Sephardi” difference turns a universal Jewish problem—one that has long plagued both Ashkenazi and Sephardi religious thinkers—into a sign of ethnic and geographical distinction.

In contrast, for the rabbis, Jewish peoplehood does not lie in local specificities that must, somehow, be connected to one another across the differential (national, cultural) effects of causal relations playing out in linear time. Rather, Jewishness seems not only to transcend differences in geography, culture, and degree of religious observance, but also to be transhistorical. Again, this is clearest in the argument for reincarnation. Otherwise, how could the same “souls” who sacrificed to the golden calf also have suffered and died during the Holocaust? It also applies to narratives of collective punishment where the specific identity of the sinner is less significant than his or her membership in a translocal and transhistorical community. And while this kind of logic does make some Jewish bodies differentially bear the burden of both individual and collective Jewish sin, they can only do so as Jews whose relationship to the divine is supposed to be the same as that of all other Jews. Put very simply, you cannot be punished for breaking a contract that was never yours to begin with. What Marienstras and Jarville read as the transformation of linear historical accident into ethnically distinctive Jewish merit was actually in many ways an insistence on Jewish *identity* that exists outside the realm of empirical difference. Jews are connected to other Jews first and foremost as Jews, and only secondarily as specific kinds of Jews in specific times and places. From this perspective, “ethnic” (Sephardi and Ashkenazi), geographical (North African and European), and civilizational (European and Arab)

differences between groups of Jews are less important than an ideal of transcendent Jewish unity.

This first example juxtaposes certain religious understandings of time and history with the “empty, homogenous time” and linear historicity associated with modern secularity (Anderson 2006). But not only religious Jews embraced messianic narratives; messianic historicity in Holocaust narratives comes in fully secularized versions, which clash just as dramatically with linear historical perspectives. According to Joan Wolf, by the 1980s many French Jews from North Africa had come to understand the relationship between their experiences and those of European Jews through analogy, particularly by comparing North African Jews’ postcolonial experiences to those of European Jews during the Holocaust (2004: 31). Some of my own research has turned up a few examples of such understandings. In April 1983, the Jewish women’s cultural magazine *Coopération Feminine* ran an issue on Jewish women’s experiences in France. It included a letter that discussed the elective affinity North African Jews saw between their experiences of dispossession and exile and European Jews’ denationalization and deportation during the Second World War. For those articulating this kind of position, North African Jews’ connection to the Holocaust was not direct, but shared Jewishness produced different yet comparable historical experiences, including uprooting and banishment. Jewishness was a privileged cause for a particular set of isomorphic effects, particularly suffering, displacement, and exile. Like the messianic stories rooted in the transhistorical unity of all Jews, these narratives also cannot be understood in linear historical time. Instead, they require vertical reasoning into a transcendent realm of simultaneity. But here this transcendent realm is secularized as something like the universal “national” condition of Jews in exile.

Not surprisingly, the extension of the Holocaust to North African Jews through elective affinity elicited a backlash. In the same issue of *Coopération Feminine*, Jacqueline Atlas denounced any comparison between North African exile and Holocaust experience, observing that North African Jews had a “choice” between France and Israel while Jews during the Holocaust had no choices (1983: 11). Anne Sinclair, a well-known Jewish journalist and granddaughter of Holocaust survivors added: “It’s certain that for people who experienced deportation, the problems of a [North African] woman arriving in Sarcelles [a peri-urban neighborhood with public housing built for the influx of French refugees after decolonization] seem irrelevant” (1983: 12). Here, once again, we see the attempt to locate Jewish unity in a transcendent realm called into question through an insistence on the differential effects (if not causes) of European and North African Jewish suffering. In a purely linear and horizontal reckoning of cause-and-effect, there is no space for contemporary Sephardim and Ashkenazim to share the Holocaust as part of their constitutive experiences as either European or French Jews.

None of the examples just cited contain the tropes that I heard most during my fieldwork in the mid-2000s. Although I was not interviewing people about the Holocaust, in a period of anxiety about increased anti-Semitism it came up in everyday settings and conversations. In those contexts, there seemed to be a new configuration of the same opposition tracked through my previous examples: a transcendent appeal to unity of Jewish experience (messianism) juxtaposed with a linear historical critique. Let me illustrate this with one particularly dramatic example.

In February 2005, I attended a talk given by Yves Azéroual, a journalist, author, and former editor of the Jewish magazine *Tribune Juive*, at the Paris Centre Communautaire, a Jewish community center in the heart of the city. Unlike most Jewish organizations in France, community centers are one of the few places where you can find a diverse Jewish public, including the secular and the religious, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, working class and bourgeoisie.⁷ Azéroual's talk was about negative depictions of Israel in the French media; but he wanted to make clear "*entre nous*" [amongst ourselves, meaning within a Jewish context] that not every negative depiction was a result of anti-Semitism, whether on the part of journalists, the French state, or the larger French public: "The friends of Israel are numerous. I hear Jews in the community tell me all the time that Chirac [then center-right President of France] is anti-Semitic, that everyone is anti-Semitic, that Jews are alone in the world, that journalists are corrupt. It's simply not true. There are some journalists who are *militants* [radicals], who are probably paid to defend Palestine. But this is not typical. Most people are just ignorant."

This frustrated some audience members, whose perceptions Azéroual had just dismissed as feeling rather than reality. Among them, a distraught middle-aged woman with a thick North African accent, asked: "Do you really think they are not all against us? It's all we see." Another audience member seconded her sentiment: "This must be the same as it was at the time of the Nazis; the same kind of *mise en scène* [theatrical display] of Jewish evil." A few minutes later, the first audience member returned to the Holocaust theme, exploding: "I feel like we are going to be eaten by them [the anti-Semitic French]. It's another Shoah that is getting underway."

This outburst immediately resulted in both Azéroual and the evening's moderator giving the audience a lecture, again "*entre nous*," on their profound "misunderstanding" of history. Azéroual began by asking/telling the middle-aged woman: "Please tell us that you do not really believe that." When she responded that she absolutely did believe what she had said, the moderator took over: "What do you think is going on right now that is like the Shoah?" The woman, at that point flustered and visibly embarrassed, misinterpreted

⁷ I thank Béatrice de Gasquet for pointing this out.

the question and assumed that she was being quizzed on her historical knowledge of the Holocaust. “I didn’t live it,” she cried defensively, throwing her hands up in the air, “I don’t know. All I know is that Jews were killed all over Europe for being Jews!” Another female audience member offered a sotto voce amen chorus, mumbling: “Anti-Semitism is growing in France!” Calmly and didactically, the moderator spoke again:

I want to clarify something. One cannot compare France, in which even if it is not a real attack [a reference to the staged or faked anti-Semitic attacks that had taken place in Paris over the previous year], the government protests immediately, going out to the community center that burned, one after another, because they are worried about what you will think given what happened during the Shoah. When a synagogue burns, or even ten in the current climate, you cannot say that it is *Kristallnacht*. We may disagree over Israel, but when Jews are attacked, the French government, for the last two, three, even four years has been there.

This uncomfortable exchange has many of the elements of the conflicts recounted above. But in the fraught context of post-2000s France, there is also an added emphasis for both Az roual and the moderator on the relationship between Holocaust narratives and contemporary Jewish Frenchness. For the audience, and most particularly the flustered woman who was reliving the Holocaust in contemporary France, the Holocaust had become unmoored. From this perspective, the Shoah is not a defined historical event, circumscribed geographically and temporally linked to the rise and fall of the Third Reich. Instead, it is continuously unfolding, embedded in the universal and transhistorical problem of violent anti-Semitism. For a number of distressed audience members, then, the temporal and sociological differences between Europe in the 1930s and the early 2000s were far less relevant than what Veena Das has called the “unfinished” past—a past that “can suddenly press upon the world with the same insistence and obstinacy with which the real creates holes in the symbolic” (2007: 134).

By linking *all* Jews to a visceral experience of the Holocaust, this “unfinished” past seems to function as a secular version of messianism. Walter Benjamin famously described this kind of historicity through his description of the “Angel of History.” He writes: “The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet...” (1974: ix). This is precisely what the woman at the community center saw: an on-going calamity that was neither past nor present, but both simultaneously. To quote Benjamin again, this is a “here-and-now” form of historicity that fits very uncomfortably with the “empty, homogenous time” of linear historical narratives (ibid.). It is also a mode of understanding the Holocaust that makes both temporal and geographical borders irrelevant. As a result, Sephardi/Ashkenazi or North African/European differences appear to be far less important than a Jewish/non-Jewish

divide that unifies Jews historically and geographically, while alienating them from the nation-states in which they happen to be living. Thus the flustered woman's conviction that "we" [the Jews] are going to be eaten by an unspecified "them"; this "them" without an antecedent could have referred to the non-Jewish French, the European population more generally, or even to a wider world that seemed for many in France to have turned its back on the Jews and Israel.

But also once again, this mode of narrating Jewish unity through a messianic historicity was countered by a linear historical argument. Note that Azéroual and the moderator immediately lectured the audience on "misunderstanding" history. In their didactic response, both made a concerted attempt to counter the audience members' temporally unmoored understanding of the Holocaust with a cause-and-effect, and therefore supposedly more "rational," temporality and narrative. The speaker and moderator re-embedded the Holocaust in a particular sociological context, if not historical moment, by insisting that a crucial feature of the Holocaust was state involvement in, rather than opposition to, anti-Semitic activities. That the twenty-first-century French state immediately condemned anti-Semitic acts differentiated contemporary Parisian Jews' experiences with anti-Semitism from those of the 1930s. So for Azéroual and the moderator, there was a clear sociological as well as temporal divide between the present experienced by *all* French Jews and the past.

This re-grounding of the Holocaust in a specific time and context had the effect of re-nationalizing French Jewry. If the Holocaust both signified and produced Jewish de-nationalization all over Europe, Azéroual and the moderator insisted on the *Frenchness* of contemporary French Jews by aligning contemporary Jewish interests with those of the state. Thus the moderator listed all the ways in which the French state and government had worked to combat anti-Semitism over the previous few years, work he said was designed to prove to skeptical Jews how much they really were a part of normative French national imaginaries. The thrust of the talk itself—which focused on the ways in which journalists and French intellectuals were often anti-Israel out of ignorance rather than anti-Semitism—highlighted political and cultural similarities across the Jewish/(post)Christian divide in France. Parrying the audience's sense of the abject position of Jews in France, the moderator noted: "I can say this because we are *entre nous*, it is easier to be a Jew than an Arab in France. We may need to condemn the way that certain young *beur* [an old slang term for Arab] behave, but the government itself is irreproachable." Both Azéroual and the moderator were working to re-ground the Holocaust sociologically and temporally in order to convince their audience of their Frenchness.

But the price of this Frenchness was in fact a set of divisions within French Jewry, divisions that threatened to exclude some Jews from the national framework itself. Recall the speaker who thought Jews were going to be "eaten" by

the anti-Semitic French. She became flustered when asked to give historical details to back up her sense of an impending Shoah, and in her confusion she ultimately excluded herself both generationally (she was too young) and geographically (she was not in Europe) from the Holocaust narrative itself—"I don't know [what happened]; I wasn't there." The way the speaker and the moderator responded—with a didactic lecture presenting the "facts" of the case—created an epistemological gap between their forms of authoritative historical knowledge and the irrational "feelings" of the audience.

This epistemological divide not only literally shamed the audience into silence, but it also mapped uncomfortably onto the ethnicized division of French Jewry. The division between "intellectual" and "emotional" Jews is a trope that was and still is used to explain the relationship between European and North African Jews, (see Arkin 2014). It was evoked by many of my Sephardi informants themselves in its moral mirror image form; they contrasted their emotional *joie de vivre* with the hyper-rational, cold affect that they associated with "Ashkenazim." It was even reproduced in some Jewish institutional spaces; in the mid-2000s, the *Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme* in Paris housed exhibits that linked Ashkenazim to male textual study and Sephardim to opulent women's dress. Azéroual was himself not old enough to have survived the Holocaust and, if his last name is any indication, may not hail from a "European" family. But in that moment he could easily have been understood as instantiating an "Ashkenazi" or European mode of authority. This mode of authority relies on dates, strict chronology, and textual sources and opposes the affective and personal authority of temporally unmoored, oral, and self-consciously subjectivist history (see Goody 1977; Goody and Watt 1968; Ong 1982; Shryock 1997). Out of their audience's sense of *collective* victimization grounded in a messianic historicity, Azéroual and the moderator produced visceral experiences of difference tied to an Orientalist divide (Said 1978), one that both pressured Jews to think and act like French nationals and Europeans while also implicitly questioning their capacity to *be* appropriately French and European.⁸

TEACHING A NORTH AFRICAN SHOAH?

The impasse with which the Parisian community center interchange ends calls for a solution, one that cannot be found in either messianic or linear historical narratives. Why? By the beginning of the Second Intifada, messianic approaches based either on an "unmoored" or metaphorical Holocaust had become politically untenable, particularly for Jewish elites. The community center vignette viscerally illustrates how an "unmoored" Holocaust raises the question of Jewish "Frenchness" and belonging at a moment when many

⁸ This was hardly a unique occurrence. I saw this kind of elite mockery of overwhelmingly North African Jewish publics repeatedly in Parisian community centers and Jewish schools.

Jewish elites were working hard to naturalize Jewish Frenchness. The non-linear, analogic reasoning many North African Jews used to write themselves into the “European” Holocaust was even more politically problematic. Such arguments have the potential to undermine the Holocaust’s uniqueness as well as its Jewishness by suggesting that other events at other moments in time produce isomorphic communities of suffering. This kind of extension of the Holocaust has long been intolerable to some French Jews. As Wolf notes (2004), in the 1980s many Holocaust survivors were appalled when young French Jews used the Holocaust as a symbolic way to create anti-racist coalitions dedicated to combating *all* forms of structural marginality and victimization.⁹ But by the early 2000s such metaphoric uses of the Holocaust had also become geopolitically problematic, perhaps in unprecedented ways. At the turn of the millennium, the Holocaust had (once again) become a major discursive weapon in French public discourse. The Holocaust as a metaphorical morality play pitting victim against aggressor, weak against strong, and good against bad had become a sign of and model for thinking about injustice in all sorts of public representations, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (e.g., Morin, Naïr, and Sallenave 2002). Linking Israeli actions against Palestinians and the Palestinian territories to the Holocaust had become a virtually everyday occurrence in French media. Here I offer just one strikingly controversial and searing example: France 2’s footage of the 2000 fatal shooting of the Palestinian child Muhammed al-Dura, a scene that was widely likened to the iconic Holocaust image of the Jewish boy in the Warsaw ghetto with his hands in the air.¹⁰ Few news reports have provoked such bitter contestation, resulting in lawsuits against the reporting journalist, Charles Enderlin, and multiple attempts to prove that France 2’s footage was doctored or manufactured (e.g., Bensoussan 2003). It will probably never be clear what happened in the Dura case. Twelve years after the incident, French courts were still hearing defamation suits from both sides (*Agence France Presse* 2012). The case, however, highlights the stakes of linking violence in Israel-Palestine to the Holocaust for Jewish supporters of Israel and their critics. Given how important and common it had become in French society to use the Holocaust as a way of thinking about power, conflict, and culpability, even Jewish

⁹ Wolf argues for a shift from Holocaust as trauma in the 1960s and 1970s to Holocaust as symbol in the 1980s. In the traumatic mode, French Jews both wanted and refused the empathy of others, in large part because the Holocaust was imagined as both uniquely Jewish and as incommensurable with any other kind of experience (2004: 192–93). In contrast, youth in the 1980s saw the Holocaust as a symbol of their structural similarity to other oppressed minority populations (ibid.: 193). See Maud Mandel (2014: ch. 6) for an account of how these diverse anti-racist coalitions quickly fell apart.

¹⁰ Several accounts of the case have been written from different perspectives (see Enderlin 2010; Fallows 2003; Rosenzweig 2010; and Tagueiff 2010).

attempts to turn the Holocaust into a kind of experiential metaphor could be a dangerous cultural and political tool.

In addition, the idea that the displacement of Jews from decolonizing Middle Eastern and North African contexts resonated with World War II Jewish experience was being dismantled through international Zionist efforts. Such metaphors opened up the possibility that Palestinian exile in the wake of Israeli statehood could be likened to Jewish experiences at the hands of the Nazis, making the equation of Zionism with Nazism possible and potentially compelling. Instead, Zionist groups were reframing North African Jewish and Palestine exile as equivalent. In 2002, the group Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC) was formed in order to lobby for the official recognition of 850,000 Arab Jewish refugees, a move imagined as a prelude to including Arab Jewish losses in any future peace settlement. That same year, the World Jewish Congress hosted a series of conferences dedicated to raising awareness of Arab Jewish expulsion. In 2006, JJAC launched a worldwide campaign to register and recognize Arab states' role in human rights abuses against and dispossession of Arab Jews (Rettig 2006). On 30 November 2014, Israel observed its first-ever national remembrance of Jewish expulsion from Arab lands (Aderet 2014). Rather than opening up the problematic possibility of elective affinity between the Holocaust and other moments of violence and dispossession, these alternative comparisons were intended to neutralize Palestinian claims about the "right of return," as well as to relativize accusations of Israeli "ethnic cleansing."

If both "unmoored" and metaphorical Holocausts rooted in messianic historicities were politically unthinkable for Jewish elites, linear accounts of the "European" Holocaust were perhaps increasingly intolerable to many North African Jews. We saw the silence and humiliation of the community center audience during the "history lesson" provided by Az roual and the moderator. Twenty-something business school student Adrien, whose parents were born in North Africa, explained in the mid-2000s:

I know I have to take precautions and everything because you can't talk about the whole, but I have the impression that the Ashkenazi people feels like it was weakened by the war and everything, because some of their parents were deported and everything. At the same time, they make others feel like they are the only ones who suffered from that.... And [despite] the fact that me, my grandparents were not deported, and other families were not deported ... I find that a bit unjustified. Because in a people, you suffer for others.... It's a union. For me, if an Ashkenazi's grandparents were deported, I have even more pain for them.... The [Shoah] concerns everyone because, from the moment it was Jews who were hurt, it even concerns non-Jews, but even more Jews.

In a less nuanced version offered by a Jewish day school parent from Algeria, "Hitler did not ask Jews whether they were Ashkenazi or Sephardi! He just killed them!"

This push-back against long-standing exclusivist, “European” Jewish narratives might have become more pronounced during the early 2000s because of a collective Jewish sense of what Algerian-born Shmuel Trigano has called the “denationalization” of French Jews, and especially North African Jews. Writing in 2003, he noted:

[W]hat is really a problem is the de-nationalization of the Jewish community entailed by the false theory of [Jewish and Muslim] symmetry. This implies a comparison between French Jews and newly arrived or recently naturalized immigrant populations.... [Sephardim] thus find themselves victims of a double betrayal because [under colonial rule] they chose France by separating themselves from Islam, under which they had been dominated subjects, and opted for France at the independence of these countries. One could not find a better way to exclude them from the nation and cheapen their citizenship (2003: 15).

In a context in which Jews *felt* like both their citizenship and nationality were being questioned and perhaps cheapened, being excluded from the European Jewishness produced by the Holocaust became even more intolerable.

This is where Nataf and his explicitly pedagogical historicity come in. Over the last ten years, French publishers have released a flurry of books telling the “untold” or “unknown” or “little known” story of the Holocaust in North Africa. These include everything from country-specific accounts of work camps and living conditions for North African Jews during World War II (e.g., Allali 2014; Bel-Ange 2006; Borgel 2007; F. Gasquet 2006; Nataf 2012; Oliel 2005), to much more general accounts of pro-Nazi, anti-Jewish sentiment in “Arab” lands (e.g., Bensoussan 2012). Additionally, North African Jewish experiences during World War II have recently become the grounds for institution-building, community center lectures, educational programming, film screenings, museum exhibits, and memorialization in France. Nataf’s commemoration of the Tunis *rafle*, as well as its growing importance in the French Jewish landscape, is one prominent example. For the sixtieth anniversary of the round-up, the commemoration was paired with a museum exhibit, a colloquium held at the Sorbonne, and a ceremony in Paris’ 4th arrondissement city hall. But the Tunis *rafle* is not the only such example. In February 2005, following France-wide commemorations of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the Tunisian-born medical doctor André Nahum gave a talk at a Parisian-area Jewish community center entitled: “L’étrange destin de Young Perez champion du monde de boxe, Tunis 1911—Auschwitz 1945” (The strange destiny of Young Perez, world boxing champion, born 1911 in Tunis and deceased 1945 in Auschwitz). In 2006, with the aid of the Claims Conference—an organization dedicated to securing reparations for Holocaust victims—the Centre de documentation du Judaïsme d’Afrique du nord pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale opened its doors. That same year, as part of a Parisian celebration of Sephardi culture, Norbert Bel Ange gave a lecture at city hall in the 3rd arrondissement on his book

Quand Vichy internait ses soldats juifs d'Algérie, 1941–1943. In 2010, Arte aired *le Maghreb sous la croix gamée*, a film based on Robert Satloff's popular book *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands* (2006), which argues that North Africa, like Europe, was a place where "righteous" Arab non-Jews took serious risks in order to help save Jews from Nazi barbarism. In late 2013 and early 2014, two different French Jewish organizations screened Antoine Casuboloi Ferro's documentary "*Les Juifs d'Afrique du nord pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*," and hosted discussions with Société d'histoire des juifs de Tunisie President Claude Nataf. And in 2015, for the first time, the Alliance Israélite Universelle's university-level public education program, called the Institut Universitaire Elie Wiesel, hosted a conference cycle on North African Jews during the Second World War. The program included historians like Georges Bensoussan, who has written extensively on Middle Eastern and North African popular and political support for Nazism.

This significant cultural activity suggests that, in the last ten years, French Jewish institutions have worked hard to "remind" the French public, and especially French Jews, that North Africa Jewry experienced Vichy discrimination, German occupation, and in rarer cases, deportation and death. But often these reminders are not just about Vichy discrimination and German occupation; sometimes they point to an extension of the Final Solution itself into North Africa.¹¹ Claude Nataf has himself embraced what could be called the "matter of time" thesis, a phrase I have taken from a 2002 Israeli documentary of that name. In the film, complex and sometimes contradictory accounts from historians and North African eye witnesses are used to argue that "the Holocaust was not just the Holocaust of Jews in Europe; it was the Holocaust of all Jewry" (JMT Films 2002). Nataf's work largely confirms such an account. In the 2006 preface to a Tunisian survivor's account, Nataf wrote: "The experiences suffered by the Jews of Tunisia clarify the Nazi intention to annihilate the totality of the Jewish people," adding that new historical work shows "that if the Nazis had won on the battlefield, they intended to kill the majority of the Jewish youth held in [Tunisian] camps by firing squad before moving into Algeria" (Borgel 2007: 19–20). Similarly, the Francophone Jewish Tunisian website, Harissa.com, cites the British historian Martin Gilbert's reinterpretation of the famous Wannsee Conference numbers (the Nazi estimate of the total European Jewish population slated for extermination). Whereas some historians (e.g., Chouraqui 1985: 428) see the seven hundred thousand estimate for unoccupied France as evidence of Nazi paranoia

¹¹ This was not simply a French Jewish effort to reframe the conversation around North African Jewry and the Holocaust. Over the same period, the International Claims Conference began pushing to expand the definition of Holocaust survivors to include North African Jews (see Jazouani 2011; Shaked 2015; and Shefler 2011).

and delusion, Gilbert insists on the number's empirical validity by suggesting that it must have included the Jews in France's North African possessions (estimated at around five hundred thousand) (n.d.; 1993). And Georges Bensoussan (2012) has depicted North Africa as another Poland, with a deeply anti-Semitic population ready and perhaps willing to be Hitler's executioners. Drawing heavily on the thesis presented by Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers in *Nazi Palestine* (2010), Bensoussan argues that the Nazi SS leader in Tunisia, Colonel Rauff, was part of a twenty-four-man advance team charged with recruiting local Muslims to help exterminate Tunisian (and then North African) Jews (2012: 610; Mallmann and Cüppers 2010: 123–25). For Bensoussan, again following Cüppers and Mallmann, long-standing popular anti-Semitism among "Arabs" all over North Africa combined with Nazi propaganda created the perfect conditions for just such recruitment.

As with the messianic and linear historical accounts, it is the historicity of these new pedagogical narratives that interests me. Many Holocaust scholars, even those like Daniel Goldhagen (1997) who problematically conflate Germanness with anti-Semitism, think genocide is the historical contingency that must somehow be explained. But for some contemporary French Jewish intellectuals, it is the absence of a Jewish genocide in North Africa that requires historical elucidation. We have already seen Nataf's insistence that but for the quick Allied victory in Tunisia, all Tunisian Jews would have been killed in a Shoah *par balles* (by bullets). Bensoussan similarly suggests that the Moroccan Sultan's desire to remain autonomous stoked his resistance to Vichy's anti-Jewish laws and that Egyptians did not massacre Jews *en masse* because the leaders of the Egyptian nationalist movement knew Hitler talked out of both sides of his mouth (Bensoussan 2012: 597, 622). Robert Assaraf, another popular writer, comes to an entirely different conclusion from Bensoussan about the Moroccan Sultan's relationship to his Jewish subjects, but nonetheless offers an identical account of a nearly missed Shoah: "If the [Germans] did not succeed [in implementing the Final Solution] in Morocco, it was perhaps in part because there was not enough time. The necessity of not too directly attacking a Sultan committed to saving his Jewish subjects, [and] the absence of favorable public opinion for extreme measures forced Protectorate authorities to tread softly and mark time. As the threat became more and more immanent, the America debarkation saved Moroccan Jews from the Holocaust" (2005: 421).

There is precedent for these kinds of accounts, particularly given that some North African Jewish communities were aware of what was happening to their European co-religionists during the war (see Yablonka 2009: 97; Saraf 1988). But while these more recent French accounts are styled as a "lost" or silenced history, they do not fit the standard mold of history. In contrast to messianic accounts, the Holocaust here does refer to a specific set of historically and sociologically grounded events narrated in linear time. And

yet this new popular historiography is full of counterfactuals styled as historical truth. It is obviously impossible to know if, everything else being *different*, Egyptians, Moroccans, and Tunisians would have participated in the genocide of local Jews. These accounts thus read as thwarted teleology rather than as attempts to line-up necessary and sufficient causes. It seems as if the end game—global Jewish destruction—is programmed into the beginning of the story. This allows all Jews everywhere to have an exclusive, and yet global relationship to that destruction. So, not only were all Jews once victims of Nazi genocide, all Jews in France are equally the heirs to this specific, unprecedented, and unrepeatable moment of racialized violence.

This pedagogical approach may not reshape the way Parisian Jews talk about North Africa and the Holocaust, given that such a reshaping would entail much more than simply replacing one historical narrative with another. The sense of being “eaten” in a European world genocidally hostile to “Jews” is a complex, phenomenological experience with deep roots. And all three of these historicities—messianic, linear historical, and pedagogical—can and do coexist, albeit amidst considerable tension and contradiction. But whether or when the pedagogical approach impacts everyday narratives about the past, it has significant political effects.

Linear teleological narratives combine the expansive understanding of “Jewishness” posited by messianic accounts with the Eurocentric frame offered by linear accounts. How so? The barely missed North African Holocaust assumes Jewish sameness across a North African/European divide. In this framework, North African Jewish experiences are not analogous variants of the Holocaust, but part and parcel of its telos, a telos that was fortuitously, and highly contingently, stopped prior to its full unfolding. This effaces the significant historical and sociological differences between and among all kinds of Jews in France, not just between “Ashkenazim” and “Sephardim,” by insisting on Jewishness itself as the most socially and historically significant aspect of identity. There is no place here for Richard Marienstras’ emphasis on the interplay between sameness and difference among Jewish communities as the grounds for Jewish diasporic connections; instead, linear teleological narratives produce a necessarily impoverished Jewish homogeneity.

These narratives also situate Jewishness within the emerging framework of a “Judeo-Christian” Europe, one that is both implicitly and explicitly juxtaposed with the “Arab” world (see Huntington 2011). They do this in a number of complex and seemingly contradictory ways. In one sense, linear teleological accounts make the whole world “Europe” for Holocaust-era Jews. Public intellectuals like Nataf and Bensoussan assume that Eastern Europe populations are the model for understanding how “Arabs” all over North Africa and the Middle East would have responded to Nazi control and propaganda. As a result, this framework implies that, during the Second World War, Polish and Tunisian Jews were identically positioned vis-à-vis non-Jewish majorities. But this is

no longer the case. Temporally re-grounding the Holocaust in a specific historical moment suggests that while Europe *was* anti-Semitic, it has since acknowledged its culpability and become more pluralist and tolerant (see Bunzl 2003; 2004). If Jews globally were victims of European history during the war, they are now part of that history. The same, however, cannot be said of those Arab Muslim contexts likened to Poland. Turning North Africa into Poland mutes the very well-documented and virulent European settler anti-Semitism that existed in places like Algeria (Abitbol 1989; Kalman 2013), while highlighting much less well-documented and seemingly timeless Arab hatred of Jews.

This kind of characterization of “Arab Muslim” civilization dovetails with an emergent French literature on contemporary forms of anti-Semitism. In contrast to mainstream French discourse that associates “Arabo-Muslim” anti-Semitism with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and what are seen as Israeli abuses of power, some critical public intellectuals link post-2000s anti-Semitism with essential “Arab” or “Muslim” characteristics that long predate the creation of Israel. For example, Shmuel Trigano, reflecting on the past fifteen years of anti-Semitic incidents in Metropolitan France, has written: “Behind the pretext of Palestine, the religious [notably Islamic] motivations of the anti-Jewish violence remain misunderstood. It would cost French elites too much doctrinal and psychological effort to accept this fact, after such a long period of denial, for it overturns their erroneous prism of interpretation. The thesis that France faces an ‘imported conflict’ still reigns today—and it remains as false now as it was fourteen years ago at the time of the Second Intifada. We are in the same place” (2015: n.p.).

Similar analyses highlighting the fundamental incompatibility between “Arab” or “Muslim” outlooks and those of both secular France and French Jews can be found in works about contemporary France by a range of French public intellectuals (Sibony 2003; Taguieff 2002; Trigano 2003; Weinstein 2004). In these historical and contemporary analyses, “Arabs” are transformed into unrepentant anti-Semites, not just anti-Zionists. If in the 1930s and early 1940s, the dominated anti-colonial/pro-nationalist populations of North Africa were baying for Jewish blood, it is Arab postcolonial states and politics that are the direct inheritors of Nazi ideologies. As a result, the real source of national and/or civilizational difference does not lie among Jews, or between European Jews and non-Jews, but between post-Holocaust Europe, now expanded to include all Jews, and the “Arabs” whose present politics, wherever they might be located, index unreformed Nazi sympathies. Thus Trigano asserts that contemporary “Arab Muslim” attacks on Jews or “people who look Jewish” “illustrate the disturbingly endemic character of this anti-Semitism, which has come from a universe that has remained foreign to fifty years of changes in Europe and which is redolent with archaic nineteenth-century images” (2002: 1).

CONCLUSION

I have laid out three different ways that French Jews talk about the Holocaust. The messianic historicities embraced by North African Jews seeking to connect their identities and lived experiences in a variety of ways with *all* Jews; the linear, historically continuous narratives used to counter such attempts at negotiating North African inclusion; and finally, the hybrid pedagogical approach that produces a globally shared and yet temporally grounded Jewish Holocaust. In outlining these three approaches, I have suggested that these fraught internal Jewish arguments are not really about what happened; they are about what might even count as part of a narrative of what happened. They are about what “history” itself might mean, how it might be shaped, and what it might include. Because these are arguments about what might constitute a “shared” past, they are also debates about what the “Shoah” is and whether it actually refers to a specific set of events in history or to a (variously imagined) structure of history itself.

Each mode of narration both indexes and produces a particular conception of Jewishness, situating French Jews, in all their tremendous diversity, differently vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis other kinds of group imaginaries, particularly Frenchness and Europeanness. The linear, historically continuous narratives I describe are resistant to internal Jewish diversity, a resistance manifested either through the production of intractable internal Jewish boundaries (religious/secular, North African/European, Sephardi/Ashkenazi) or through the flattening of necessarily diverse Jewish experiences across sociological and political contexts (Wright 2015). These historically continuous narratives also seem to be attuned to “national” histories rooted in the isomorphic relationship between genealogy, culture, and territoriality. As a result, linear Holocaust narratives seem quite attentive to both French and European formulations of the “Jewish question,” carefully positioning Jews inside both the newly “Judeo-Christian” French nation and post-World War II European “civilization.” In contrast, the non-linear “messianic” stories, whether secular or religious, are more accommodating of empirical diversity, allowing for a considerable range of experiences of Jewishness united through a much more transcendent conceptual unity. Yet this capaciousness comes with a moral price: the categorization of some forms of Jewishness as heretical and even dangerous to the Jewish social body. Nevertheless, even these internal heretics remain first and foremost Jews. As a result, these conceptions of Jewishness, which are often trans-historical and trans-geographical, underwrite far greater insouciance about how French Jews are positioned vis-à-vis either French national identity or European civilizational belonging.¹² There is therefore less concern about

¹² For a similar observation about Algerian Jewish conceptions of Frenchness in an entirely different set of circumstances, see Davidson 2015.

how European non-Jews of any stripe think about contemporary incarnations of the “Jewish question.” This suggests that there may be significant differences in the epistemologies and conceptions of belonging, and not just in the politics, of those who differently mobilize the Holocaust to fight, defend, or identify with a global Jewish community instantiated in Israel.

These disagreements about how to talk about the Holocaust therefore suggest that French Jews are also arguing about what the category “Jew” means in contemporary France and Europe. Though many French public figures loudly insist that Jews are both quintessentially French and European,¹³ the disagreements and anxieties on display in North African Holocaust narratives tell a different story. What *does* it mean to be Jewish in post-Holocaust and postcolonial France? Does Jewishness inherently index Frenchness? Europeanness? Or is it more closely tied to a different kind of social and political imaginary, one that sits uncomfortably with both standard anthropological and nationalist understandings of culture and belonging? Who gets to decide? And what are the political as well as social and epistemological consequences of such a decision?

Most social science of contemporary Europe does not focus on such categorical uncertainty. Instead, the emphasis has been the ways in which Jewishness has been normalized in the post-World War II and postcolonial period as a domestic, non-threatening, and quintessentially “European” identity, especially in relation to “foreign” Muslims (see Benbassa 2004; Bowen 2007; Bunzl 2004; 2007; Fassin 2006; Fernando 2014; Lindenberg 2002).¹⁴ This analysis is problematic for many reasons, not least because Jews are almost always depicted as *leaving* Europe (see Hammerschlag 2016). It also makes it hard to understand contemporary French Jewish reactions to anti-Semitism and Israel as anything other than cynical political ploys on the part of a fundamentally secure population. The Holocaust narratives described here tell quite a different story, one in which the “Europeanness” of French Jews is far from assured, and is something not all Jews see as either possible or desirable. These stories highlight uncertainty around whether, and for whom, Jewishness counts as a categorical identity, or how it might fit into either European nation-states or Europe more generally.

This categorical uncertainty points to the importance of an emerging conversation among French colonial historians, one that is really just beginning and insists on rethinking French colonial history outside the “identity” categories (French, Muslim, Jewish, indigenous, native) that seem so self-evident

¹³ I could cite numerous examples, but here I will limit myself to a striking public example. In 2015, the head of the most important secular French Jewish organization in France, the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France (CRIF), told attendees at the organization’s annual dinner: “We would be less French if we were not Jewish” (Cukierman 2015).

¹⁴ For a contrasting and much more skeptical take, see Boyarin 2009 on France, and Mandel 2008 on Germany.

from a contemporary perspective (Davidson 2015; 2012; Katz 2015; Mandel 2014; Schley 2015; Shepard 2008; 2013; Schreier 2010; Stein 2014). The attention these colonial historians bring to the contingency and slipperiness of these categorical positions is a reminder of the constant and always contested sociological work required to make difference into sameness and sameness into difference. This is a lesson that social scientists, particularly anthropologists, taught historians. Social scientists who study Europe may now need a refresher course from the historians.

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Abstract: Drawing on ethnographic data from the mid-2000s as well as accounts from French Jewish newspapers and magazines from the 1980s onward, this paper traces the emergence of new French Jewish institutional narratives linking North African Jews to the “European” Holocaust. I argue that these new narratives emerged as a response to the social and political impasses produced by intra-Jewish disagreements over whether and how North African Jews could talk about the Holocaust, which divided French Jews and threatened the relationship between Jewishness and French national identity. These new pedagogical narratives relied on a very different historicity, or way of reckoning time and causality, than those used in more divisive everyday French Jewish Holocaust narratives. By reworking the ways that French Jews reckoned time and causality, they offered an expansive and homogenously “European” Jewishness. This argument works against a growing postcolonial sociological and anthropological literature on religious minorities in France and Europe by emphasizing the contingency, difficulty, and even ambivalence around constructing “Jewishness” as transparently either “European” or “French.” It also highlights the role played by historicity—not just history—in producing what counts as group “identity.”

Key words: historicity, temporality, Holocaust education, France, Europe, Sephardim, North African Jews, belonging