

The Jews of Modern France

Images and Identities

Edited by

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Defining France and Defending Israel: Romantic Nationalism and the Paradoxes of French Jewish Belonging

Kimberly A. Arkin

In 2004, a group of French journalists¹ asked the head of a major French Jewish organization—the CRIF [*Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France*, Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France]—what he thought about Turkey’s eventual admission to the European Union. Although the question seemed to clash with the interview’s focus on French Jewish concerns, Turkey’s relationship to Europe had recently become a French national election issue, with a number of candidates taking positions against Turkey’s admission to the European Union as a way of shoring up French nationalist credentials. Roger Cukierman, then president of the CRIF, made it clear why Turkey’s admission was also a Jewish issue:

Elisabeth Schelma: The entry of Turkey into the EU? No, except? Yes, but? No? Yes?

Roger Cukierman: [Sigh, provoking laughter from the audience.] I can’t respond because there is a Turkish Jewish community that would like to be accepted. But I have a sense of discomfort and doubt. If the biggest European country by its population is a Muslim country, if we add to this population . . . the millions of Muslims who live in Europe, Europe risks losing its Judeo-Christian character.

Claude Askolovitch: How can a child of the *Shoah* have nostalgia for Judeo-Christian Europe; I can’t really understand it.

Cukierman: I’m not nostalgic for . . .

¹ Claude Askolovitch from the center-left magazine *Nouvel Observateur*, Elisabeth Schelma from the pro-Chirac and openly Zionist alternative news agency *ProcheOrient.info*, and Catherine Corroler from the mainstream left newspaper *Libération*. I was present at the interview and recorded it. All translations of oral statements and textual materials are mine.

Askolovitch: No, when you talk about Europe's Judeo-Christian tradition, you give the impression that the Jewish community was so happy in this Judeo-Christian Europe.

Askolovitch's evident astonishment was not surprising. Cukierman is an Ashkenazi Jew. His parents fled Poland for France in the early 1930s. As a young child, French families hid him from the collaborationist French police and the Nazi occupiers. So Cukierman's personal experience militated against imaging Judaism as an integral part of French or European identity. But Askolovitch's surprise went beyond the clash between Cukierman's experiences as a Jew in twentieth-century Europe and his idealistic invocation of Judeo-Christian unity. Cukierman's vision of a Judeo-Christian Europe represented a very public rupture with older Jewish institutional modes of imaging political and social community. For good historical reasons, French Jews since the Second World War largely have avoided publicly talking about European political communities, whether national or transnational, in ethno-religious terms. But Cukierman seemed to be grounding Europe in just such an imaginary. Rather than emphasize the way voluntary political contracts produced plural political communities, or even the way that structured class relations and engagements might produce such a community, Cukierman seemed to claim that large-scale political and social identities were ethnic and religious. How, then, can we understand the paradox of a European Jew, and a Holocaust survivor to boot, articulating what appears to be a Romantic conception of political community? And, given the close connection in contemporary French political discourse between 'European' and 'French' identities (if not politics), what might Cukierman's comments tell us about changes in the storied historical relationship between public French Jewishness and Republicanism?²

Cukierman's voice was just one in a growing chorus of French Jewish leaders and intellectuals who seemed to be turning toward a version of what Douglas Holmes has called 'integralist' imaginaries.³ In the early 2000s, many of these

2 Pierre Birnbaum, *Les fous de la République: histoire politique des juifs d'état, de Gambetta à Vichy* (Paris: Fayard, 1992).

3 Douglas Holmes, *Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000). Holmes uses the word 'integralism' to describe a Europe-wide response to the rapid and bewildering political and economic changes that have accompanied European integration since the 1980s. Rooted in the tropes of Romanticism and the counter Enlightenment, Holmes sees integralism as defying traditional political divisions between left and right and as mobilizing "an organic approach to life and politics" over and against what are imagined as the morally and socially crippling effects of late modernity.

thinkers increasingly mobilized conceptions of identity and belonging rooted in organic communities composed of culturally similar citizens, juxtaposing what they called ‘nations’ with artificially constituted, cosmopolitan ‘societies.’ In this essay, I use the works of two major French Jewish intellectuals—Alain Finkielkraut and Shmuel Trigano—to highlight the central themes of French Jewish ‘integralism,’ contrasting it with earlier arguments (often made by the same thinkers) about the contours and nature of political community in general and Frenchness in particular. I suggest that the surprising emergence of integralism among French Jewish intellectuals is an attempt to negotiate Jewish belonging in light of contemporary French antisemitism: antisemitism that renders Jews, in contrast to Muslims, *culturally* French while simultaneously producing them as *politically* inassimilable once-and-future Israelis.⁴ Integralism challenges this tendency to split Jewishness across cultural and political lines by defining France and Frenchness in a way that facilitates the defense of Israel as an ethnoreligious nation-state. As we shall see, this move—defending Israel by defining an exclusionary vision of France—creates ‘elective affinity’ between ‘Jews’ and ‘the French’ over and against ‘Arab Muslims.’ In the process, Jews, whether in France or the Middle East, become ‘isomorphic’ with ‘the French.’⁵

1 Antisemitism, Israel, and French Jewish Belonging

Quite a bit has been written both inside and outside France about the upsurge in symbolic and physical violence against French Jews since the start of the Second Palestinian Intifada in 2000.⁶ Here I would like to emphasize two

4 One could make the opposite argument for Muslims: while they are incessantly produced as *culturally* foreign in contemporary France, diasporic politics around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict bring them *politically* closer to mainstream French discourse.

5 Zygmunt Bauman, elaborating on the Weberian concept of elective affinity, has written: “Elective affinity is not a causal relation. Neither is it a matter of ‘similarity.’ It is, rather, a relation of *isomorphism*, of ‘commutation’ between two autonomous sets of phenomena: the inner relations between phenomena of one set may be represented as replicas of those of the other.” *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Polity Press, 1993), 156, emphasis in original.

6 A small number of French historians and intellectuals have tried to situate contemporary antisemitism within the larger historical context of pre- and post-World War II French antisemitism and French racism, see for example Michel Wieviorka and Philippe Bataille, *La tentation antisémite: haine des Juifs dans la France d’aujourd’hui* (Paris: Laffont, 2005). Far more work has been done outlining the *difference* in contemporary antisemitism’s origin and content, focusing on its anti-Zionism and link to Muslim ‘immigrants’ (often second and

contradictory but coexistent trends in the way many French Jews (and non-Jews) perceive and characterize this violence. The first is that Jews are targeted not just because they are Jews, but also as quintessential symbols of France itself, and more particularly French Republican values. This argument has been made in a number of forms and at a number of different social locations: by officials at the very highest levels of French government, representatives of French Jewish institutions, and private Jewish individuals. In all of its forms, this argument collapses the distance between French Jews and Frenchness, insisting on the structural as well as cultural connections between Jews and France. It also locates antisemitism outside French values and dispositions, whether or not its perpetrators actually have French citizenship. In these characterizations, antisemitism is not an age-old problem implicit in the contradictions of political belonging in a nationalized Europe, but a new phenomenon embedded in populations that do not have appropriate European or French dispositions.⁷ In other words, antisemitism no longer comes from the French nationalist far right, it comes from 'Muslim immigrants.'

How does this manifest itself in Jewish responses to antisemitism? Here I want to offer just a few examples from different social locations and times. At demonstrations against antisemitism in the mid-2000s, the *Union des Etudiants Juifs de France* (UEJF), the largest union of Jewish university students, marched with banners that read "*synagogue brûlée, République en danger*," a burning synagogue means the Republic is in danger. In 2005, the secular Zionist organization *Hachomer Hatzair* issued a petition denouncing, seemingly interchangeably, both antisemitism and 'anti-white/anti-French' sentiment among

third generation) in France, see for example Georges Bensoussan, *Antisemitism in French Schools: Turmoil of a Republic* ([Jerusalem]: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2004); Emmanuel Brenner, *France, prends garde de perdre ton âme: Fracture sociale et antisémitisme dans la république* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2004); Emmanuel Brenner, *Les territoires perdus de la République: antisémitisme, racisme et sexisme en milieu scolaire* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2002); Alain Finkielkraut, *Au nom de l'autre: réflexions sur l'antisémitisme qui vient* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003); Pierre-André Taguieff, *La nouvelle judéophobie* ([Paris]: Mille et une nuit, 2002); Shmuel Trigano, *La démission de la République: juifs et musulmans en France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2003). For a critique of this debate, see Matti Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds Old and New in Europe* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2007).

7 See for example, Brenner, *Les territoires perdus de la République: antisémitisme, racisme et sexisme en milieu scolaire*; Brenner, *France, prends garde de perdre ton âme*; Taguieff, *La nouvelle judéophobie*.

banlieue—read black and Arab—youth.⁸ Scores of Jews whom I interviewed while doing fieldwork in Paris in the mid-2000s explained that antisemitism was motivated, at least in part, by ‘Muslim jealousy’ at French Jews’ cultural and economic achievements, including social integration and socio-economic mobility.⁹ Even as antisemitism has changed over the last few years, shifting from racialized incidents of theft targeting adolescents and young adults¹⁰ to deadly violence against institutionalized settings of Jewish identity,¹¹ this discourse has remained unchanged. Manuel Valls, a former Interior Minister under socialist President François Holland and, as of early 2015, French Prime Minister, responded to recent bloody acts of antisemitism by insisting on the indissoluble bonds between French Jews and France. In a speech given at a CRIF dinner, Valls remembered the Jewish day school children killed in Toulouse by Mohammed Merah, noting, “when a Jew is attacked for what he is, for what he believes, it is the Republic, France, and our values that are under attack.”¹² Similarly, in January 2015, after Amedy Coulibaly’s attack on the *Hypercacher* on the outskirts of Paris, Valls told a crowd assembled in memoriam, “France,

8 The context for this petition against ‘anti-white’ racism was a series of demonstrations led by high school students against the center-right government’s proposed reforms to the national curriculum. Some demonstrators were viciously attacked and robbed by other teenagers and young adults, some of whom explained that their goal was to “casser du Blanc,” or maul Whites.

9 As both Maud Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict*, and I, *Rhinestones, Religion, and the Republic: Fashioning Jewishness in France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), have argued in different ways, there are historical reasons why the children and grandchildren of some North African immigrants may look at French Jews, who are in their vast majority also of North African origin, as signs of the asymmetrical opportunities for different groups in Republican France. While there has been considerable North African Jewish economic and social mobility since the 1960s, the same cannot be said for North African Muslims.

10 The torture and murder of Ilan Halimi in early 2006 falls into this camp; he was targeted because his attackers thought Jews were ‘rich’ and therefore his family would offer a handsome ransom in exchange for his release.

11 In March 2012, Mohammed Merah shot three uniformed French soldiers in Montauban before turning to a Jewish day school in Toulouse, where he killed four people, including three children. In May 2014, a French gunman—Mehdi Nemmouche—killed four people at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels. And in January 2015, just after the Kouachi brothers killed 12 people at the headquarters of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, Amedy Coulibaly killed four people at a kosher supermarket on the outskirts of Paris.

12 “Manuel Valls appelle à combattre l’antisémitisme virulent,” *Le Point*, February 27, 2014, sec. Politique.

without French Jews, would no longer be France.”¹³ Roger Cukierman then inverted this phrase, telling attendees of the 2015 CRIF dinner: “We would be less French if we were not Jewish.”¹⁴

The arguments cited above about the origins of antisemitism suggest that Jews are becoming *unmarked* members of the French cultural majority who are targeted by outsiders contemptuous of or excluded from a French Republican project. But at the same time, there is a parallel discourse that links antisemitism with anti-Zionism rather than anti-Republicanism. This linkage effectively ties antisemitism to the (anti-Israel) politics of the French majority, not just to the politics of Muslim minorities. As a result, in this narrative, Jews are no longer tokens of French Republican values and aspirations, but Israelis whose politics and very national existence are rejected by ‘the French.’ And indeed, in French media, Israel is routinely portrayed as systematically violating fundamental European values. It is described as a racist state, likened to apartheid South Africa, and condemned for excessive use of force against an impoverished and relatively weak population. When major national dailies, like the left-wing *Libération* and the left-center paper of record *Le Monde*, publish commentaries on Israel written by French Jews, they most often confirm these kinds of representations, despite the fact that such views are hardly representative of French Jewish perspectives. Whether intended or not, the implicit message is that being a *French Jew*, which is the self-identity of many of those writing these kinds of columns, requires disavowing Israel’s political trajectory and treatment of minorities.¹⁵

While this story about Jewish distance from mainstream French political values obviously has not been a significant theme for French Republican leaders, it is a leitmotif of Jewish institutional and everyday discourse. Again,

13 “Valls: ‘Il faut combattre le nouvel antisémitisme né dans nos quartiers,’” *Le Parisien*, January 13, 2015, sec. A la une.

14 Roger Cukierman, “Discours de Roger Cukierman au dîner annuel du CRIF” (Paris, February 23, 2015), <http://www.crif.org/fr/lecrifenaction/%C2%ABnous-serions-moins-fran%C3%A7ais-si-nous-n%C3%A9tions-pas-juifs%C2%BB/54603>.

15 See, for example, Esther Benbassa, “Pour une autre politique du CRIF: le président élu dimanche devra s’attacher à dissocier la lutte contre l’antisémitisme du soutien inconditionnel à Israël,” *Libération*, May 13, 2004; Esther Benbassa, “La guerre des mémoires: la polémique autour de l’héritage colonial français libère les revendications mémorielles,” *Libération*, January 2, 2006; Esther Benbassa, “Le CRIF, vrai lobby et faux pouvoir,” *Le Monde*, February 17, 2010; Edgar Morin, Sami Naïr, and Danièle Sallenave, “Israël-Palestine: le cancer,” *Le Monde*, June 4, 2002. Esther Benbassa, a historian at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*, is both a darling of the mainstream French media and a bête noire for Jewish institutions and community leaders.

a few examples. At a now infamous 2005 dinner, Roger Cukierman accused former Socialist President Lionel Jospin of promoting antisemitism through ‘pro-Palestinian’ foreign policies.¹⁶ In an interview with me in 2005, a philosophy teacher at a Jewish school offered a variation on this theme, explaining that French media coverage of the Second Intifada was unabashedly pro-Palestinian. For him, the upsurge in antisemitic violence that followed the beginning of Intifada, as well as the general French indifference to that violence, were inseparable from this barrage of anti-Israeli propaganda. Similarly, scores of French Jewish adults in the mid-2000s told me that they had taken measures to insulate themselves from French incomprehension of Jewish political concerns. These measures included cancelling subscriptions to mainstream French newspapers and refusing to talk to non-Jewish friends about Israel. As the President of the UEJF, Yonathan Arfi, explained to me in 2005, “Anti-Zionism runs deep in France because French people cannot understand the existence of Israel; [they cannot understand the existence of Israel] because they cannot understand the idea of Jews as an ethnic, rather than a religious, group.” For Arfi and many others, the root of the problem was French normative society, not its poorly assimilated exterior margins. Mainstream secular French attempts to separate out ‘culture’ from ‘religion’ had rendered Jewishness as a cultural, ethnic, *and* religious formation incomprehensible.¹⁷

And despite continual governmental efforts to reassure Jews—like Valls’ pronouncements quoted above—this sense of Jewish isolation from the French mainstream has deepened, driven in part by French politics in relation to Israel.¹⁸ In 2014, Yonathan Arfi told me that while the ‘*classe politique*’ had

16 He noted: “I have to tell you about the discomfort I feel. Discomfort related to what I think is the incompatibility between France’s international politics and its internal politics around fighting antisemitism” Agence France Presse, “M. Barnier juge ‘presque décourageants’ les critiques du président du CRIF,” February 14, 2005. He added, “France’s foreign politics is often perceived as conflating America and Israel, Zionism and imperialism, globalization and oppression. Whether intended this way or not by diplomats, this confusion is very real in public opinion and fuels the amalgamations that hurt Jews.” Judith Waintraub, “Cukierman fait le procès de la diplomatie française,” *Le Figaro*, February 14, 2005, sec. Société.

17 For a discussion of French secularism and the splitting of ‘religion’ from other aspects of community and communal imaginary, see Mayanthi Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

18 There have been widespread calls for an economic boycott against Israel; pro-Palestinian demonstrations in the summer of 2014 attracted a politically and socially diverse crowd and, at times, degenerated into explicit antisemitism; and France has consistently refused

started to combat the French Republican problems that were leading to anti-semitism in all its forms, the same was not true for the general French population, which still saw Jews as the issue: “Jews don’t feel like they are allowed to speak in public space. So they have withdrawn from talking about anything other than antisemitism.” Cukierman noted in March 2014 that while being explicitly antisemitic is still not considered polite, “it is elegant to blast the State of Israel,” suggesting—despite his frequent assertions to the contrary—that he does *not* think France’s problem with Jews is confined only to ‘young Muslims.’¹⁹ Even after the massive public response to the January 2015 killings, which included the slogans ‘*je suis juif*,’ ‘*juis suis policier*,’ ‘*je suis Charlie*’ [I am a Jew, I am a police officer, I am *Charlie* [Hebdo]], some Jewish leaders and intellectuals expressed disappointment at the perceived lack of French solidarity with Jews. Gil Mihaely, for example, explained to *Le Figaro*:

Lots of French Jews feel very alone. For example, after the attacks on the 7th, 8th, and 9th [of January], the leitmotif became liberty of expression; but that was not the common denominator among the victims: they were victims of terrorism. Neither the Jews of Vincennes [at the kosher market] nor the police officer from Montrouge were sacrificed on the altar of liberty of expression. For Montrouge, it was probably a botched attack on a Jewish school; at Vincennes, it was a successful attack against a kosher market. The attacks on [the Jewish school at] Toulouse and [the soldiers at] Montauban garnered far less of a reaction [than the Charlie Hebdo] attacks. During the attacks against [the synagogue] at rue Copernic in 1981 [sic], the prime minister at the time, Raymond Barre, said: ‘this odious attack was directed against *Israélites* going to synagogue and killed innocent French people crossing the street.’ Today, there is a sense that this slip continues to reveal something deeply ingrained in the [French] collective unconscious: Jews are never innocent victims.²⁰

to integrate Israel into its *Organisation de la francophonie* despite Israel’s considerable (and now growing) Francophone population.

- 19 “Le CRIF implore Hollande de faire de l’antisémitisme une ‘cause nationale,’” *Le Point*, March 4, 2014, sec. SOCIÉTÉ.
- 20 Anne-Laure Debaecker, “Antisémitisme: les juifs sont-ils les «parias de la République?»” *Le Figaro Online*, January 27, 2015, sec. Vox Société.

These simultaneously deployed discourses leave Jews on opposite sides of France's lines of 'internal exclusion.'²¹ In the first, Jews are 'the French' targeted by an outside, primarily Arabo-Muslim other imagined as uncivilized and uncivilizable. In the second, Jews are the outside 'other' targeted by 'the French.' I would like to suggest that this is precisely the circle that French Jewish integralism attempts to square, in part by suggesting that France and Israel share a model of community and belonging that is threatened by the same kinds of forces. This turns the defense of Israel instantiated in the second discourse into a defense of France, exemplified by the first.

2 From Society to Nation

In order to show how this works, I am going to trace out the surprising intellectual convergence between two very different French Jewish thinkers, Alain Finkielkraut and Shmuel Trigano. Finkielkraut is a secular Jew, philosopher, and professor at the prestigious *Polytechnique*. He has long defended progressive, humanistic universalism against what he calls the *volkish* cultural relativism of the post-modern world.²² He has styled himself an enemy of Montesquieu, Herder, and their post-modern heirs, who see men only in their particularist, culture and time-bound manifestations. He has championed an Enlightenment understanding of Man, defined by universal reason and a transcendent commitment to "the Good, the True, the Beautiful."²³ He has condemned nationalist, post-colonial, and post-modern thinkers for defining individuals first and foremost as members of groups, rather than as free, rational beings. And he has likened champions of cultural integrity and particularism to defenders of racialized ideas of human difference, arguing that the logic of incommensurability behind race and Herderian (read anthropological) culture concepts are identical. Thus, while lauding the collapse of the idea that nations are rooted in racialized peoplehood, he has asked:

Where is the progress? Like the old advocates of race, the current champions of cultural identity reduce individuals to group belonging; they imagine difference in absolutist terms, and, in the name of particularism

21 Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (New York: Verso, 1991), 43.

22 Alain Finkielkraut, *La défaite de la pensée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

23 *Ibid.*, 15–18.

and causal indeterminacy, they destroy human unity founded on either nature or culture.²⁴

As is always the case, Finkielkraut's universalism is hardly universal. His claims about universally recognizable standards are deeply embedded in the values and embodied practices of dominant segments of French society.²⁵ For example, he has long advocated the 'preservation' of standard French over and against its bastardization in the mouths of working class, semi-urban, often second or third generation 'immigrant' youth.²⁶ But this did not make Finkielkraut's thought exclusionary in ethno-nationalist terms. In fact, what Finkielkraut seemed to deride above all were the ways that Romantic thinkers and their descendants erected impenetrable boundaries of various kinds, whether ethnic, national, racial, or religious. As a result, one of the leitmotifs of his critique of post-1968 politics has been its failure to understand the great moral disparity between the colonial politics of domination and Nazi politics of extermination. For Finkielkraut, the former, however horrible in implementation, was rooted in a conception of universal human capacity. The latter, in contrast, was premised on the dehumanization and elimination of certain human groups. Refracted through Finkielkraut's philosophical lens, colonialism leveled geographical, historical, and cultural boundaries; Nazism used dehumanization and death to create the most impenetrable boundaries possible.²⁷

24 Ibid., 109.

25 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

26 Alain Finkielkraut and Sylvain Bourmeau, "Débat: Alain Finkielkraut et Sylvain Bourmeau," *Les Matins de France Culture* (Paris: France Culture, November 28, 2005), <http://www.franceculture.fr/emission-alain-finkielkraut-et-sylvain-bourmeau-2005-11-28.html>. In this radio interview, Finkielkraut called for the "reestablishment of the school as the primary means of transmitting language" in order to eliminate the '*parlé banlieue*' or ghetto speak that he sees as a violent deformation of French.

27 Michel Feher has framed this bifurcation in a different way. He argues that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict revealed two irreconcilable understandings of 'evil' in French society: one reading associated with 'domination' and therefore colonialism and another associated with 'phobia' and therefore totalitarianism. From this perspective, Finkielkraut would see evil as driven by 'phobia,' and thus would defend Israel against an anti-colonial camp that might justify the extermination of Jews *because* they are viewed as dominant. "Le Proche-Orient hors les murs. Usages français du conflit israélo-palestinien," in *De la question sociale à la question raciale*, ed. Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 91–105.

This universalist Finkielkraut painted a clearer portrait of what French society was not than of what he thought it was. He condemned both left and right wing versions of relativism. He criticized post-colonial attempts to resurrect 'pure' national forms over and against 'cosmopolitanism,'²⁸ and he deplored the 'new' European right's opposition to post-colonial immigration in the name of preserving 'European' difference.²⁹ He also condemned the 'pluri-culturalism' of the antiracist European left as the quickest way to foreclose upward mobility and full citizenship to those 'enveloped' by their own differential cultures.³⁰ Rejecting the construction of France as a society rooted in 'her' culture, whatever that might be, Finkielkraut fantasized about a France that was rootless, tethered only to the ever-changing possibility of individual and collective transcendence provided through great literature (wherever it came from) and philosophy. Finkielkraut approvingly quoted the anti-nationalist Pole Witold Gombrowicz:

A French person who pays attention to nothing outside of France, is he more French? Or less French? In fact, being French means taking into consideration other things besides France.³¹

This is hardly a very specific sociological vision, but it certainly suggests that Finkielkraut would have recused any attempt to attribute a specific and fixed *content* to Frenchness. Instead, Frenchness appears as a voluntary and yet deeply-rooted orientation toward constant self-transformation and progress—an idea with no territorial or firmly specified cultural boundaries.

28 Finkielkraut has, for example, likened Franz Fanon's rejection of post-colonial elites' embrace of 'cosmopolitanism' to racist German romanticism: "The German romantics said: 'All that is foreign, all that is introduced into the life of a people without good reason becomes a vector for social illness and must be removed if the people are to remain healthy.' In the same way, [for Fanon] it is the fear of intermixture, the obsession with purity, and the specter of contamination that cultural identity substitutes for colonial arrogance" Finkielkraut, *La défaite de la pensée*, 105–6.

29 He is a critic of what, after Samuel Huntington, has come to be called the 'clash of civilizations' theory. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011). Finkielkraut argues against the idea that "it's a tragic illusion to want to make communities from different civilizations live in the same country," deploring the expansion of such thinking into "politically respectable *milieux*" Finkielkraut, *La défaite de la pensée*, 122–4.

30 Finkielkraut, *La défaite de la pensée*, 126.

31 *Ibid.*, 138.

This is precisely where Finkelkraut's discourse has begun to shift. Since 2001, he has acquired an entirely new public persona. In the 1980s and 1990s, he presented himself as a French intellectual, foregrounding his rejection of Jewish 'tribalism.' In *Le Juif imaginaire*,³² for example, he refused any mystical or essentialist conception of Jewishness, arguing that as European Jews shed religious practices and became fully normalized citizens of Western democracies, the category 'Jew' also lost its essential content and meaning. Instead, as Sarah Hammerschlag has argued, it became a past that had to be grappled with from an exterior position: "Judaism is no longer for me so much an identity, as a form of transcendence. Not something that defines me, but a culture that can't be embraced, a grace I cannot claim as mine."³³ In contrast, today Finkelkraut seems to have reappropriated Jewishness as a defining feature of his inner being. He is a self-proclaimed 'Jewish intellectual' and a mainstay of the Jewish communal lecture circuit.³⁴ He has even registered his own surprise at the transformation:

To my own surprise, I was led to do a weekly program for RCJ [*Radio Communauté Juive*, Jewish Community Radio]. The Jewish intellectual that I would never have thought that he could one day express himself on a community radio station. It's the context [of resurgent antisemitism] that pushed me to do it.³⁵

His 'community' engagement is far more extensive than this single radio program. He speaks on everything from foreign affairs to French sociology at Parisian Jewish community centers and is a regular columnist with *Tohu Bohu* and *L'Arche*, both Jewish monthly magazines with significant intellectual content. And, perhaps most notably, he has even claimed that he no longer feels comfortable thinking or fully expressing himself outside of a Jewish context, particularly on matters related to Israel.³⁶

32 *Le juif imaginaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

33 Cited in Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

34 Raphaëlle Leyris and Paul Bernard, "Alain Finkelkraut: 'Je n'ai pas honte de réagir comme juif,'" *Tohu Bohu*, December 2002, 9.

35 Ibid.

36 Yonathan Arfi et al., *Les enfants de la République: y a-t-il un bon usage des communautés?* (Editions de la Martinière, 2004). This is somewhat ironic because some (but certainly not all) of Finkelkraut's sharpest critics are Jewish Israelis. The Israeli film producer Eytan Sivan sued Finkelkraut in French courts for 'defamation' after Finkelkraut accused him on television of being "one of those actors in a particularly offensive and horrifying

With this shift in public persona has come a new strain in Finkelkraut's thinking.³⁷ From a deep distrust of the particular in all guises, Finkelkraut has begun justifying and even lauding certain kinds of territorial and cultural boundaries. For example, in some contexts he has slipped from denouncing 'pluriculturalism' to deeply distrusting 'hybridity' and 'métissage.' If pluriculturalism for Finkelkraut meant too many walls, resulting in the juxtaposition of divergent and perhaps even incommensurable values and ways of being within the same polity, hybridity and métissage mean too few walls. Writing about the triumphalism of the antifascist left after the defeat of far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of presidential voting in 2002,³⁸ Finkelkraut reminded the public that this sense of victory was in fact illusory:

Having evidently voted with the Republican majority, I share their happiness . . . but you have to have a soul quite confused by the tragic past not to recognize this: hatred's future is in their camp and not in that of those still faithful to Vichy. In the camp of the smile and not of the grimace. Among men considered human and not those thought of as barbaric. In the camp of the hybridized [*métissée*] society and not in the ethnic nation. In the camp of respect and not that of rejection . . . In the ranks of those who unconditionally support 'the Other,' not among the petit bourgeois who only love 'the Same.'³⁹

reality, today's extensive Jewish antisemitism" "Le cinéaste E. Sivan débouté en appel dans son procès contre A. Finkelkraut," *Agence France Presse*, May 23, 2007. In addition, two Francophone journalists for the left-leaning Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* provoked an international scandal when they used Finkelkraut's own words to portray him as anti-Arab and anti-black. With the subtitle "You Israelis Will Understand," they further implied that Finkelkraut presumed Israelis could instinctively relate to his racism. Mishani Dror and Aurelia Smotriez, "What Sort of Frenchmen Are They?" *Ha'aretz*, November 18, 2005, English edition, <http://galliawatch.blogspot.com/2006/01/finkelkraut-haaretz-interview-and.html>.

- 37 Eric Fassin builds the recent 'hardening' of Finkelkraut's discourse into the very logic of his original positions. He argues that Finkelkraut's universalism has always been nationally-infused, designed to fight the culturalist ideologies and politics of the 'anti-imperialist left' with Culture. But with the growth of anti-Zionism-cum-antisemitism on the anti-imperialist and anti-racist left, Finkelkraut is now logically fighting racism (antisemitism) with racism (anti-immigration-ism). "Aveugles à la race ou au racisme? Une approche stratégique," in *De la question sociale à la question raciale*, ed. Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 124.
- 38 In the first round of voting, Jean-Marie Le Pen garnered more votes than the then sitting socialist President, Lionel Jospin.
- 39 Finkelkraut, *Au nom de l'autre*, 20, emphasis in original.

Here, Finkielkraut seems to suggest that boundaries—whether imagined as biological, cultural, or social—are no longer the source of the most devastating and shared ideological failings on the left and on the right. Rather, the camp of the ‘smile’ has a new failing unique to the left: its desire to pull down walls. Elsewhere Finkielkraut has called this a project to emancipate “men by the generalized hybridization of cultures and identities.”⁴⁰

Note as well Finkielkraut’s emphasis on the distinction between ‘society’ and ‘nation’ in the lengthy passage quoted above. Where previously Finkielkraut underlined the ideological similarities between what he called ‘pluricultural societies’ and ethnic imaginaries of the nation, here he intentionally seems to emphasize the ontological and philosophical differences between a society and a nation. He makes this distinction clearer in another context, arguing that he would regret anything that would transform the ‘French nation’ into a ‘multicultural society.’⁴¹ With this distinction, Finkielkraut seems to be self-consciously evoking the furious nineteenth-century debate between Enlightenment-inspired modernists, particularly thinkers like Emile Durkheim, intent on rationally ordering and guiding internally diverse ‘societies,’ and counter-Enlightenment Romantics dedicated to the natural telos and authenticity of the ‘nation.’⁴² He also seems to share the counter-Enlightenment perspective, from which it is the homogenous ‘nation’ that is organic, and therefore natural, stable and functioning; ‘societies,’ on the other hand, are a hodge-podge of unrelated elements forced into a set of ‘mechanical’ relationships, and therefore “artificial . . . devoid of the spirit of life.”⁴³

What is all the more surprising about Finkielkraut’s inversion of Durkheim’s⁴⁴ understanding of modern European societies is the way he links integralism to Jewish *inclusion*. If Durkheim thought the best way to argue for Jewish Frenchness was by emphasizing the primitiveness and weakness of homogeneity (‘mechanical solidarity’) as a foundation for society, Finkielkraut seems to do just the opposite. Finkielkraut deplores the transformation of a ‘nation into a ‘society’ not only because it deforms France by forcing it into an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ model, but also because he thinks it will be “bad for the Jews.”⁴⁵ This is

40 Arfi et al., *Les enfants de la République: y a-t-il un bon usage des communautés?*, 27.

41 *Ibid.*, 34, emphasis in original.

42 Holmes, *Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism*.

43 Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 53–5.

44 *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1984).

45 Arfi et al., *Les enfants de la République: y a-t-il un bon usage des communautés?*, 34.

why he also stresses the importance of both defining and defending French culture:

... what [France] has that is beautiful deserves all our compassion because she is disappearing... In a France that hates herself and that is losing her heritage, Jews are in a much more dangerous position than in a France that is proud of herself.⁴⁶

And what is this 'heritage' that France must be 'proud of' and work hard to save? The Judeo-Christian tradition evoked at the opening of this article. According to Finkelkraut:

We have to find a way for religion to once again be part of our culture. Not religion in general. First and foremost Christianity, but also Judaism because both religions have contributed to creating this [French] culture [*en tant qu'ils ont contribué à façonner cette culture*].⁴⁷

The excluded term is too obvious to miss: Islam, despite its considerable role in the processes that have indelibly shaped contemporary French society, has made no contribution to 'French culture.'⁴⁸

But why does Finkelkraut think Jews are endangered by 'métissage' or a 'multicultural society?' How can a France true to her national 'heritage,' which

46 Leyris and Bernard, "Alain Finkelkraut: 'Je n'ai pas honte de réagir comme juif,'" 9.

47 Arfi et al., *Les enfants de la République: y a-t-il un bon usage des communautés?*, 36.

48 For an account of the way contemporary French self-understandings, political structures, and social categories are rooted in colonial dynamics in North Africa, see Naomi Davidson, *Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1992); Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (University of Chicago Press, 2005). I want to be clear. The exclusion of Islam and Muslims from 'European history' is currently part of the dominant mode of narrating and therefore defining Europeanness. See, for example, Talal Asad, "Muslims as a 'Religious Minority' in Europe," in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). There is thus nothing particularly Jewish about this kind of exclusionary discourse. The question I am raising here is why some Jews, whose own history has also long been excluded from narratives of Europeanness, would embrace this particular model for defining community and belonging.

has long been used to exclude Jews, be better protection for contemporary Jews than a concept of political community that accommodates and even incorporates internal differences? The answer, for Finkelkraut, is Israel. In a society built on destroying racial, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, Israel's very foundation is incomprehensible. Understanding the necessity of a 'Jewish' nation-state, requires embracing the notion that political communities can and perhaps even should be rooted in primordialized identities, in Herderian communities. Finkelkraut writes:

The emancipation of men by hybridizing identities and cultures [implies] that no separate existence is justifiable and that we should work hard to hybridize the world. And the Jews in that story? It makes no more place for the demand for a Jewish state than the progressive narrative that calls everyone to fight against domination.⁴⁹

Similarly, he argues that Jews are not now hated for their cosmopolitanism, but for their betrayal of that quality:

Far from highlighting the disturbing strangeness of Jews, now we [the French] reproach their normalization just at the moment when we have rejected it; we are distressed by their untimely assimilation and the violence that pushed them to deify and sanctify the Land just at the moment when the Enlightened world converted *en masse* to transcending borders and nomadism.⁵⁰

In other words, Finkelkraut suggests that *French* national imaginaries create the conditions of (im)possibility for understanding Israel as an ethno-religious nation. Only in a France that imagines itself as a Judeo-Christian *nation* rather than a hybrid *society* can Israel and French Jewish politics around Israel become legible and comprehensible. Without seeing France as rooted in the exigencies of ethno-religious community, Finkelkraut is convinced that the French will never be able to understand Jewish opposition to, for example, a bi-national Israel or Palestinian claims for restitution of lands lost in 1948.⁵¹

Finkelkraut's conversion to integralism contains a certain kind of irony. Just like the incredulous reporter who wondered how Cukierman, a Holocaust survivor, could rehabilitate an ethno-religious conception of Europe, one might

49 Arfi et al., *Les enfants de la République: y a-t-il un bon usage des communautés?*, 27.

50 Finkelkraut, *Au nom de l'autre*, 21–2.

51 Arfi et al., *Les enfants de la République: y a-t-il un bon usage des communautés?*, 26.

wonder how Finkelkraut, the child of Holocaust survivors and a long-time defender of Republican universalism might find himself also imagining communities in organic, culturalist terms. There is a different kind of irony in the integralism of Shmuel Trigano, another highly visible, self-identified Jewish intellectual. Trigano is a philosophy professor at Paris X and the head of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle's* college-level Jewish studies program. Unlike Finkelkraut, he himself is an 'immigrant,'⁵² an Algerian Jew who fled North Africa in the wake of French decolonization. He has always had close ties to the institutional Jewish community in France. Throughout the 1970s, he wrote articles for *Tribune juive* and *L'Arche*, two of the most significant organs of the French Jewish press. Unlike Finkelkraut, Trigano's major, mainstream academic publications have always revolved around questions about Jewish identity. And he has long been a regular public panel speaker and organizer for Parisian Jewish institutions like the Alliance.

In contrast to Finkelkraut, Trigano argued for decades that Enlightenment universalism was its own form of dangerous particularism. Rather than distinguishing between assimilatory and eliminatory modes of dealing with difference, Trigano saw both as equally threatening to Jews. He has linked the Holocaust to the economic and political legacies of the Enlightenment, not the Counter Enlightenment.⁵³ He has written scathing critiques of the way French universalism disaggregates the Jewish community while nonetheless continuously interpellating individual Jews as members of a group.⁵⁴ And he has accused Western, and more particularly French, Jews of responding to this impossible double bind by betraying their 'peoplehood' and surrendering the 'political' dimension of Jewishness.⁵⁵ He has characterized French Jewish

52 The term is in scare quotes because most Algerian Jews have had French citizenship since the 1870 Crémieux decree. Trigano is therefore not an immigrant in terms of citizenship status; or at least he is no more of an immigrant than the French-born children and grandchildren of North African Muslims who, as we shall see, he continuously calls immigrants. However, North African Jews' relationship to both public Jewishness and Frenchness has historically been quite different from that of Ashkenazim. Kimberly Arkin, *Rhinestones, Religion, and the Republic*; Naomi Davidson, "Brothers from South of the Mediterranean": Decolonizing the Jewish 'Family' during the Algerian War," *French Politics, Culture and Society* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2015).

53 Shmuel Trigano, "Untitled," *L'Arche*, December 1978, 23.

54 Shmuel Trigano, "From Individual to Collectivity: The Rebirth of the 'Jewish Nation' in France," in *The Jews in Modern France*, ed. Frances Malino and Bernard Wasserstein (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985), 245–81.

55 Ibid. For Trigano, Sephardim—meaning Jews from Muslim countries—are the last repositories of this authentic mode of Jewishness, in large part because he sees them as the

Zionism as a manifestation of this impasse and moral bankruptcy: a way of asserting a collective life without actually living one, an impotent political engagement that does not challenge French definitions of citizenship.⁵⁶

All of this suggests that, while Finkelkraut's early work evacuated any kind of essential content from the modern category 'Jew,' Trigano dramatically reified the term. He insisted on the absolute singularity, historical continuity, and incommensurability of the Jewish experience:

Jewishness has always been movement, hope, conflict towards the realization of a different world. No other people has ever nurtured such a loving relationship with its own sense of destiny and vocation. No other people has ever produced the singular bizarreness that is the Bible . . .⁵⁷

But this reification of Jewishness did not translate into a straightforward embrace of Jewish nationalism. He has applied his critiques of the nation-state form to Israel itself, arguing that the desire to 'normalize' Jews within the framework of western-style secular nation-states is hardly faithful to the 'Jewish idea' forged at Sinai.⁵⁸ But what the 'Jewish idea' forged at Sinai would look like in the contemporary world has never been particularly clear. After reading a piece by Trigano, a confused reader of *L'Arche* wondered whether he thought Jews should fight 'the West' in the Diaspora or 'return' to Israel; another seemed shocked at the link between capitalist nation-states and the Holocaust, noting that Israel was both capitalist and democratic.⁵⁹ But whatever this 'Jewish idea' looked like, it seemed clear that it needed to be realized outside the confines of the nation-state, including perhaps the currently existing Jewish nation-state.⁶⁰

But Trigano too has recently changed his stripes. From a dangerous trap for Jews whether in Israel or the West, Trigano now seems to think the integralist nation-state is the only foundation on which stable, meaningful community can be built. In an interview published by the French-language edition of the

least 'touched' by the Western Enlightenment. Shmuel Trigano, "L'exil des sépharades au sein du peuple juif," *Tribune juive*, May 9, 1980, 15.

56 Trigano, "From Individual to Collectivity: The Rebirth of the 'Jewish Nation' in France," 264.

57 Shmuel Trigano, *La nouvelle question juive* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 23.

58 Shmuel Trigano, "Les fils sont sur le point de naître et point de force pour accoucher," *L'Arche*, March 1979, 39; Shmuel Trigano, "La question juive," *L'Arche*, February 1979, 37; Trigano, *La nouvelle question juive*.

59 Unknown, "Letters to the Editor," *L'Arche*, January 1979, 5–6.

60 There is a clear distinction, for Trigano and many others, between the nation-state of Israel and *Eretz Yisrael*, the biblical 'Land of Israel'.

Jerusalem Post (and then disseminated over the Zionist website desinfo.com), Trigano described the *fait national*, or fact of nationalism, as natural and even inevitable:

... after 70 years of communism, all the old Eastern European nations colonized by the USSR, the holy orthodox Russia have reappeared as if nothing happened, confirming the permanence of the *fait national*.⁶¹

He has criticized leftist Israeli historians for undermining people's real experiences and values by adopting a 'postmodern' and 'postnationalist' perspective.⁶² For Trigano, these historians live in a de-structured, Benedict Andersonian world where 'narratives' are opposed to one another, not real groups of armed people.⁶³ This, he suggests, does violence to the objective world and the way people live in it. Israel, for Trigano, is no 'imagined community.' Rather,

[T]he Jews [are] a people ... because a people has a history, is inscribed in a territory, has a place in the world. A people writes its own history ... It forges its own identity. No one has the right to contest the Jewish people's biblical continuity or its historic rights to the Land of Israel ... The negation of these rights is even more scandalous because it has emerged in the cultural universe forged by centuries of Christianity and Islam, whose practitioners cannot help but remember Israel's antiquity—both in terms of existence and relationship to her land.⁶⁴

Trigano has made basically the same argument for France. In *La Démission de la République: les juifs et musulmans en France* [The Capitulation of the Republic: Jews and Muslims in France], he has argued that France increasingly disavows 'national identity,' leaving the foundation of political and social order to the far-right.⁶⁵ But solving France's most pressing problems—first and foremost immigration—demands renewed attention to the nation:

61 Shmuel Trigano, Une entreprise de délégitimation de l'état d'Israël, Website, May 25, 2007, www.desinfo.com.

62 Shmuel Trigano, "Israël et la France face à la nation," *Revue internationale et stratégique* 47, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 11–22.

63 Ibid.

64 Shmuel Trigano, *L'ébranlement d'Israël* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 43–4.

65 *La démission de la République*, 26.

[W]e have to accept the idea that the framework for the immigration problem is the nation, both its form—nationality—and its content—national identity. The sociological equation for this definition is simple: the arrival of several million foreigners into a society that already has a history, an identity, a genealogy [*filiations*] has, in demographic terms, a seismic impact. The entrance of a new body into an already constituted one shakes a society's symbolic and political morphology to its core. In order to survive, it has to redefine itself, integrating this new element according to its own laws.⁶⁶

As any historian of France knows, this characterization of France as an always, already established organic entity is empirically false. As Eugen Weber beautifully illustrated decades ago, the imaginary (let alone reality) of France as a culturally-integrated—and for that matter, even French speaking—polity is extremely new.⁶⁷ In addition, as Gerard Noiriel has compellingly argued, contemporary France has always been a nation of immigrants, despite state-based discursive regimes that say otherwise.⁶⁸ Behind Trigano's patently ahistorical claims about what France is, we again find some of the key elements of integralism. Trigano's organicist metaphors—France has a history, a genealogy, and identity—underwrites his insistence that contact between variously constituted cultural groups leads to systemic disorder. For Trigano, the resulting social dysfunction might very well be 'fatal' if the already 'constituted social body' cedes to the standards of the invaders:

In January 2003 we heard the head of the European Arab League, an Anvers faction that has its own militia and 'police,' declare (on TF1) that just as state and religion are separated, the state should be separated from any particular cultural model. In Sweden, Arab Muslims are demanding that the cross be taken off the national flag because they are as Swedish as their fellow citizens... [sic]. Democrats are very often willing to give into these demands right up until the moment that they realize that the beneficiaries are, in fact, resolutely anti-democratic and are only interested in damaging [*faire reculer*] European identity.⁶⁹

66 Ibid., 29.

67 *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

68 *Le creuset français* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992).

69 Trigano, *La démission de la République*, 82.

In other words, multiculturalism in either its melting pot or mosaic modalities is a trap, a way of disarming a national public so that foreigners can impose their own cultural identities on well-meaning but hapless Europeans. Similarly, social contract theories of the nation are misguided. The ellipses after ‘fellow citizens’ suggests just what Trignano thinks about Swedish ‘Arab Muslims’ claiming equality with other Swedish nationals. They are not, he insists, like those who have long been part of the national culture and genealogy. They are perhaps constitutionally incapable of becoming full members of any European society. And this incapacity applies to all Arab Muslims, regardless of history, citizenship, and religious observance:

They [Arab Muslims] belong to a religion that has not modernized and has not been part of the Republican pact. Its members are former or current nationals of foreign countries that, although very close to France geographically, have historically been competitors with the West and Christianity in general... Entering this identity that I call ‘France[,]’... which I consider as a given necessary for emotional and political stability, would require that Arab Muslims completely reform their identity, their religion, and even their psychology.⁷⁰

This may not be an appeal to Arab Muslim biological difference, but it offers an equally deterministic assessment of what they are and where they belong: outside the West in general and France in particular.

Perhaps the most surprising piece of Trignano’s rendering of political community is the space it creates for *Jewish* Frenchness. While acknowledging that coming up with a definition of Frenchness is difficult, Trignano nonetheless attempts an answer:

The whole problem is managing to define [France’s] foundation. It has to be a flexible definition, one that recognizes the legitimacy of secondary groups—voluntary associations—confined to civil society but inflected with culture, religion, or memory. These secondary identities would exist within the framework of a French identity defined by language, culture, and collective values. This might mean a form of enlightened secularism that is not sectarian, but that does not erase the historically Christian foundation of [French] collective culture...⁷¹

70 Ibid., 91.

71 Ibid., 123.

A Christian-inflected, French-speaking secularism is thus the only fully embodied identity possible in the French nation. This is the assimilationist compromise Trigano seemed to denounce earlier in his career, but with a Romantic twist: certain groups may have to (impossibly?) alter their very ‘psychology’ in order to accommodate such a configuration. But if Arab Muslims will not and cannot become French, Jews—who are also overwhelmingly the children and grandchildren of North African immigrants—have always been and/or were always destined to be French. Only an antisemite would claim otherwise by comparing Jews with Muslims:

[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.⁷²

Jews, he adds later, “are fully French, part of national life while accepting and defending what they are: the same and different.”⁷³

3 Defining France, Defending Israel?

Unlike Finkielkraut, Trigano does not explicitly connect his change of heart around nationalism in general, and French nationalism in particular, to concerns about Israel. In order to link Trigano’s arguments about the nature and foundation of Frenchness to the French Jewish predicament and Israel, I want to draw on insights taken from anthropologist Matti Bunzl’s work on Jews in Austria.⁷⁴ Bunzl has argued for a link between Austrian Jews’ relationship to Israel and European conceptions of political community. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Bunzl noted declining interest in *aliyah* and lessening

72 Ibid., 15.

73 Ibid., 71.

74 Matti Bunzl, “Austrian Zionism and the Jews of the New Europe,” *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003): 154–73; *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Twentieth-Century Vienna* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

commitment to the idea of Israel as *the* Jewish homeland. Paradoxically, the ties between Austrian Jews and Israel started to loosen just as Jörg Haider's antisemitic Freedom Party (FPÖ) became part of Austria's national governing coalition.⁷⁵ Bunzl explains this paradox through the diminishing relevance of national imaginaries within the context of an expanding European Union, a context that has challenged Austria's sovereign autonomy and created unprecedented opportunities for intra-European movement. For Bunzl, the increasing ideological and empirical irrelevance of the nation-state form made Israel, as a *Jewish* nation-state, less central to Austrian Jewish imaginaries. In other words, Austrian Jews suddenly could be Austrian when Austria ceased to be a terminal and exclusive identity category. Bunzl writes:

From the Austrian-Jewish perspective, it certainly seems that conventional Diaspora Zionism is about to recede into the past. As Europe's nation-states are dissolving, so too are the political configurations that engendered Zionism in the first place. In the larger historical context, this would seem to put pressure on Israel's *raison d'être*.⁷⁶

In other words, when the nation-state as a social and political form comes to appear irrelevant or outdated, even Jewish commitments to a Jewish nation-state become harder to sustain.

In many ways, I think both Finkelkraut and Trigano are attempting to reverse that equation. I have already mentioned the way Finkelkraut links French discourses like *métissage*—with its call for leveling cultural, ethnic, racial, and national boundaries—to the vilification of Israel. Although Trigano is less explicit, he too seems to be establishing a form of elective affinity between France and Israel; like Jews in relation to 'the French,' Trigano seems to imply that France and Israel are both 'the same' and 'different.' If France can be imagined as an ethnoreligious community—French speaking, Judeo-Christian, sharing both culture and consciousness—then Israel's ethnoreligious Jewishness seems much harder to criticize as either racist or anti-democratic. Indeed, by working to rehabilitate Romantic national imaginaries in France, both men emphasize the naturalness and centrality of a certain conception of belonging. When seen from this perspective, a defense of ethnoreligious nationalism is no longer evidence that one is racist or on the wrong side of history. Instead, such a defense becomes the *only* way to preserve stable, functional sociopolitical communities, whether Jewish or French.

75 Ibid., 154.

76 Ibid., 170.

For both Finkielkraut and Trigano, far from authorizing potentially dangerous (anti-Jewish) forms of politics, integralism makes Europe safe for Jews by normalizing Israel; it also makes Israel safe for Jews by justifying the State's continued refusal to accept Palestinian refugees or to subordinate its Jewishness to democratic exigencies.

But if integral nationalism helps rehabilitate Israel, it is not immediately obvious how it squares the circle I mentioned at the beginning of this piece. How does it allow Jews to be culturally and politically *French*? In fact, does it not do just the opposite, raising the question of whether Jews can ultimately be anything other than Jews-cum-Israelis? And if it does somehow square the circle, how does the full integration of Jews into Judeo-Christian France not negate Jewish nationalism? Here too the logic may rely on an implicit isomorphism (sameness and difference) between the French and Israeli cases. Let us return to the opposition Roger Cukierman established between Turkish Jews—who he assumed were and would want to be considered European—and Turkish Muslims—who he insisted could not be thought of as Europeans. Cukierman acknowledges that both groups have Turkish citizenship. But he does not think they are Turkish in the same way: their origins, affiliations, and allegiances are imagined to be diametrically opposed. Finkielkraut and Trigano echo this theme, placing Jews and Muslims into ontologically distinct communities. Trigano, in particular, emphasizes Jewish/Muslim distinction, notably in his refusal to even entertain the notion that Jews and Muslims—despite shared geographical and historical roots—might be compared in the French context. Remember he considered this a denigration of Jews. This same ontological opposition to Muslims grounds both contemporary Israeli nationalism and articulations of French identity.⁷⁷ The links between recent debates about the content of Frenchness and (attempted and enacted) legislation against a whole host of Muslim practices, including headscarves, burqas, even ritual slaughter, is hardly accidental. As Talal Asad has suggested, if there is anything consistent about contemporary discursive invocations of Europeanness or Frenchness, it is the seemingly categorical exclusion of Muslims and Islam.⁷⁸ From this perspective, Jews-cum-Israelis are isomorphic with 'the French' and

77 For historical accounts of this opposition in the Colonies, see Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith the Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010). For a historical and analytical account of its manifestations in the Metropole, see Davidson, *Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France*.

78 "Muslims as a 'Religious Minority' in Europe."

with Europeans more generally. They can be ‘French’ politically and culturally because Jewishness, like Frenchness, is understood increasingly as having a purely negative and differential relationship with Islam. As Finkelkraut exclaimed to an interviewer: “I just realized this. Faced with the simultaneous de-dramatization of anti-French violence and the occlusion of anti-Jewish violence, I wonder if Jews are the last French people [*français*].”⁷⁹

4 Conclusion

There have been a number of accounts, journalistic and otherwise, of French Jews’ relatively recent ‘rightward’ turn in France.⁸⁰ In some ways, these accounts link contemporary Jewish politics to a profound *normalization* of Jewishness in France.⁸¹ Both Eric Fassin⁸² and Daniel Lindenberg,⁸³ for example, situate French Jewish thinkers like Finkelkraut and/or Trigano within the larger social and intellectual context of the “new French right,” implying the erosion of the structural particularities that have helped produce overwhelmingly progressive Jewish politics since the revolutionary period.⁸⁴ In a different way, the French Jewish historian Esther Benbassa makes a similar point. In her book *La République face à ses minorités: les juifs hier, les musulmans aujourd’hui* [The Republic and its Minorities: Jews Yesterday, Muslims Today],⁸⁵ she insists that the structural position occupied by Jews in France from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century is now occupied by Muslims. Jews, in

79 Leyris and Bernard, “Alain Finkelkraut: ‘Je n’ai pas honte de réagir comme juif,’” 8–9.

80 See, for example, Fassin, “Aveugles à la race ou au racisme? Une approche stratégique”; Feher, “Le Proche-Orient hors les murs. Usages français du conflit israélo-palestinien”; Cécile Gabizon, “La droite progresse au sein de l’électorat juif,” *Le Figaro*, June 19, 2006, sec. Francepolitique; Daniel Lindenberg, *Le rappel à l’ordre: enquête sur les nouveaux réactionnaires* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

81 These kinds of analyses are not only about France. See Bunzl, *Antisemitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds Old and New in Europe* for an account of Jewish normalization leading to public Jewish support for right-wing parties with histories of antisemitism.

82 “Aveugles à la race ou au racisme? Une approche stratégique”

83 *Le rappel à l’ordre: enquête sur les nouveaux réactionnaires*.

84 For an account of why Jews had few political options other than progressive and Republican parties, see Birnbaum, *Les fous de la République*; Pierre Birnbaum, *Jewish Destinies: Citizenship, State, and Community in Modern France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

85 Esther Benbassa, *La République face à ses minorités: les juifs hier, les musulmans aujourd’hui* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2004).

this account, have become relatively *unmarked* French citizens. As a result of these accounts of Jewish normalization in contemporary France, a number of scholars have seen Jewish fears around resurgent antisemitism as paranoia or cynical politics, or both.⁸⁶ Here I offer a different explanation, one that pays attention to the continued *difference* of French Jews and French Jewish thinkers both structurally and experientially. French antisemitism—whatever its sources—and Jewish understandings of antisemitism illustrate that Jews are (once again!) liminal in France. In some crucial ways, the construction of post-colonial France over and against Islam in general and North African Muslims in particular has placed Jews—particularly ‘Arab’ Jews—in a deeply uncomfortable structural position. As I have argued elsewhere,⁸⁷ the essentialization of Jewishness has become important to the work of distinguishing Jews from Muslims, and particularly ‘Arab’ Jews from ‘Arab’ Muslims. But while opening up the possibility of Frenchness to Jews in a way foreclosed to Muslims, the foregrounding of essentialized versions of Jewishness *also* exiles Jews from French Republican political imaginaries.

Given this, we can read the surprising embrace of integralist notions of political community among all sorts of French Jews—intellectuals, community leaders, everyday citizens—as a symptom of Jews’ renewed structural insecurity in France. From this perspective, integralism is a political imaginary that attempts to resolve an impossible bind; it turns the essentialized opposition between Jews and Muslims into a way of simultaneously claiming Jewish Frenchness and Israeliness. When viewed in this way, we not only gain deeper insight into the otherwise baffling embrace of a form of politics that historically endangered European Jews. But we also better understand the stunning resilience and longevity of national political imaginaries that bear little resem-

86 See, for example, Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds Old and New in Europe*; Fassin, “Aveugles à la race ou au racisme? Une approche stratégique”; Lindenberg, *Le rappel à l’ordre: enquête sur les nouveaux réactionnaires*. I am not contesting the facts that some of these thinkers present. Matti Bunzl and, more recently David Cesarini, are absolutely right to insist that there is no institutionalized, state-sanctioned antisemitism in Europe and that previously antisemitic parties, like the French *Front National* and the Austrian FPÖ, now present themselves as philosemitic. Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds Old and New in Europe*., David Cesarini, “There Is No ‘Wave’ of Anti-Semitism,” *The Huffington Post UK*, January 26, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/david-cesarini/anti-semitism-charlie-hebdo_b_6542550.html. I am simply contesting what Jewish fears in contemporary France *mean*, and resituating them within the troubled triangle that makes Jews and Muslims negotiate national belonging in France via claims about cultural, political, and civilizational distance from one another.

87 Arkin, *Rhinestones, Religion, and the Republic*.

blance to empirical reality. As postmodern and poststructuralist scholars laud the ways in which minority groups help deconstruct national cultural and political forms,⁸⁸ French Jewish integralism calls attention to the opposite phenomenon: the sometimes surprising and often overdetermined ways in which minority groups can help reinforce exclusionary concepts of political community.

88 See, for example, Asad, "Muslims as a 'Religious Minority' in Europe"; Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*.