

## ABSTRACT

*Antisemitism in French schools and universities has reached a worrying level. Its more spectacular manifestations are an increasing physical and verbal violence against Jewish pupils, as well as an unbearable pressure exerted upon teachers who try to lecture about the Shoah and the Second World War.*

*The phenomenon is deeply-rooted and not essentially limited to the Israeli-Arab conflict. Antisemitism in French schools is symptomatic of a social and identity crisis which may endanger the Republic and its fundamental values.*

For many observers, the history of the Holocaust is no longer only a historical fact, nor even a source of political reflection for our time, it is a moral viaticum which is supposed to curb antisemitism. The purveyors of this myth explain that if “schoolchildren were told about the Holocaust,” it would be possible to dam the wave of antisemitism.

However, it is in the twenty-year period which has seen a marked improvement in the teaching of the Holocaust in French schools, that antisemitism has flourished as never before, adopting an outspoken virulence the likes of which have not been known in France since the Occupation and the Vichy regime. The Holocaust has never been taught as well as it is today, and never has antisemitism been as robust as it is today. Yet this fact cannot be explained by citing the lack of information about the horrors of antisemitism, the complicity from which these horrors benefited, the ordeals of the forced transportation, arrests, and incarceration, the nightmare of the deportation, or the nameless abyss of the mass exterminations.

Nothing has helped.

Antisemitism has continued to thrive. At the beginning of 2004, in a secondary school in the Val de Loire (in the center of France), a teenager wrote the following anonymous message after seeing a Holocaust exhibit: “This is what we feel: ‘the poor wretches,’ especially the crematoria, it’s hot in there! Great, you couldn’t escape. As for me, I’m doing well. *Alhamdulillah* (thank God!). It did the trick!”

The memory of the Holocaust makes less and less sense. It has become confused with a memory of the well-off, and so it is depicted as a memorial symbol of the established order against those who have nothing and live their lives as though they have been deprived of the right to speak.<sup>1</sup> For these mutes of history, and these former colonized peoples, it is a memory of ruling classes, and when it attempts (quite rightly) to assume a guise of universality, it encounters a society whose identity has become sectarianized. Reduced to an uncommon story, in a universe where the accident of birth is the single determining factor, the Holocaust has become nothing more than the misfortune of the sole “Jewish community.”

This is the background for an unusual event, involving 15-year-old twin sisters, which took place in a large Paris secondary school in March 2002: forty minutes of insults (“Jew bitches,” “Yids,” “You’re a slut as well as a Jew”), physical violence, their faces and clothes coated with apple and cheese because “Jews stink,” forty minutes of “hell” surrounded by a group of twelve students who finally ordered one of the sisters to kneel down and beg “forgiveness for being Jewish.”

How has French society reached the stage where the values on which the Republic was founded are so fragile? Are we to believe those who rush to assure us that the antisemitic flames are being fanned by the “policies of General Sharon”? We would then have to forget that anti-Jewish violence increased tenfold between October 2000 and February 2001, a period when Labour Prime Minister Ehud Barak headed an Israeli government engaged in a peace negotiation (meeting in the Egyptian town of Taba in January 2001). Furthermore, are the Jews of France Israeli citizens that they should answer for the actions of the Israeli government? Are the synagogues and Jewish schools consular premises of the state of Israel, so that the aggression inflicted on *French* citizens in their own country can be interpreted as a legitimate consequence of Israeli government policy? Finally, and most importantly, by attributing the marked rise of antisemitism in France (between 1999 and 2003, anti-Jewish acts increased fourteen-fold) to the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Georges Bensoussan, *Auschwitz en héritage? D'un bon usage de la mémoire* (Paris: Mille et une Nuits, 2003).

Palestinian intifada, Jews are held responsible for their misfortune in accordance with a tried and tested pattern of antisemitism.

The Israeli-Arab conflict has become the presentable outer garment of a French nation struggling to cope with the effects of mass unemployment, economic decline, and problems generated by almost fifty years of extensive immigration from north Africa. Initially a migration of people seeking work, this wave mutated into a general immigration and finally became an essential ingredient of the French demographic mix.

The fact remains that only part of this population has integrated into the life of the nation. It left, by the wayside, in the outlying housing estates of the large cities, a disinherited mass, often unaccepted and poorly educated, to fester in resentment and bitterness. It all happened as though the “social issue” of the 19th century, which has never been settled, had been ethnicized. The “dangerous classes” of old now live in the “housing estates” and they are rarely of French origin. The social has become concealed by the ethnic and at the heart of this ethnicization of the “social issue” of the 19th century, antisemitism resonates like a rebellion led astray. In the face of this violence, the exclusively republican and moralizing speeches of the French political elites are more or less as effective as was once the paternalistic, clerical sermonizing of the highborn.

In June 2004, the Central Directorate of General Information (DCRG) released an alarming report. Of the 630 areas described as “sensitive,” warned the heads of the French police force, more than 300, housing some two million people, were showing signs of “ethnic withdrawal” and ghettoization characterized by some distinctive features: the large number of families of immigrant origin, often Muslim, practising polygamy; the presence of “ethnic shops” where non-halal meat and alcohol are banned; the proliferation of mosques, the wearing of traditional clothing, the decline in the status of women, and last but not least, obsessive antisemitism. The withdrawal is obvious in a quarter which has become an ethnic and social ghetto. The world and society are too distant, and the community itself is not part of this withdrawal, in view of the structured nature of all community life, which is synonymous with solidarity and cultural unity. “The withdrawal

takes place in the ghetto, a place devoid of meaning” remarked the sociologist Didier Lapeyronnie.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of 2004, this situation seems to have been exacerbated still further. The French police recorded 42 anti-Jewish acts during the third quarter of 2003. This figure rose to 67 for the first quarter of 2004. Between January and June 2004, the total of antisemitic acts rose to 135, i.e., more than for the whole of 2003 (127 recorded acts).<sup>3</sup> Yet, in the face of this disintegration of the social fabric, many figures of authority, in particular those in secondary schools tend to deny, ignore, and conceal recognized facts which are splitting French society in two. On the one hand, there is a deteriorating situation to which many people can bear witness. On the other hand, there are vague, soothing speeches stigmatizing “sectarianism” without giving it a name. Rare cases of Jewish children refusing to go to school on Saturdays are blown up out of all proportion; such cases are all the rarer, if not atypical, in the French public school system since the vast majority of children of practicing Jews go to Jewish schools. People talk of students refusing to eat meat which has not been slaughtered in accordance with religious law, while intimating that this refers to Muslim students as well as their Jewish fellows. The latter, however, are at least ten times more numerous than the former, and above all, as stated above, they go to Jewish schools. In this respect, everything indicates that the affair of the Islamic veil has become one of those which best *conceal* the French reality. In July 2004, the Inspection Générale de l’Éducation nationale (IGEN, General Inspectorate of National Education) published a gloomy report on the situation prevailing in 61 French secondary and vocational schools. Girls are forbidden by boys to wear short skirts, a practice which is in their eyes contrary to Islam, and threatened with (real) reprisals outside school. Arab parents refused to let their daughter go to school

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<sup>2</sup> *Le Monde*, 6 July 2004.

<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the number of acts of aggression against Maghrebis and blacks also rose: 95 were recorded from January to June 2004, compared with 51 for all of 2003. However, to understand the seriousness of the antisemitic wave sweeping through France, these acts should be compared with the numbers of the populations in question. The number of Maghrebis and blacks is estimated to be almost 10 times greater than the number of Jews. In other words, to achieve a degree of parity with the number of antisemitic acts, at least 1,350 racist acts should have been committed against Maghrebis and blacks during the first half of 2004, which is far from being the case.

after her female teacher, who was on sick leave, was replaced by a male teacher. Women arrive at nursery school veiled from head to toe, which makes it difficult to give them back their children, since they cannot be identified. Muslim-Arab schoolchildren in primary school started the custom of using separate taps, one for the “Muslims” and the other for the “French.” Muslim leaders requested separate changing rooms for the students, “since circumcised males cannot undress alongside the unclean” [*sic*].<sup>4</sup> A head teacher, in order to circumvent any possible problem, decided that all his students would eat halal meat. Managers of school cafeterias lay separate tables for Muslims and non-Muslims. Students of Arab origin bring in prayer rugs so that they can set up discreet places of worship far from their school. Those who doubt this desire to do battle should remember that on June 29, 2004, before the start of the academic year in September, the UOIF,<sup>5</sup> an organization close to the Muslim Brothers, and a stakeholder in the official French Council for the Muslim Religion (CFCM) set up by the state, called on young girls to “wear the clothes of their choice”—in other words, to disobey the recent law on secularism. In the event of a dispute, the UOIF promised “legal assistance” to the families and even “academic support” in the event of expulsion. It is striking to note that aside from the Paris Mosque, these are the only *non-Arab* Muslim organizations which have distanced themselves from this belligerent position. This underlines still further the Arab rather than the Muslim aspect of this war of entrenched positions against a republican and secular France.

Yet far from being manipulated only by obscurantist reactionary imams, this Arab-Muslim offensive is being led by educated young men, who are both religious and radical, determined to do battle and displace older, more moderate leaders. Faced with disinherited young people, these suburban Savonarolas offer a militant Muslim identity which excludes the West, “France,” and “Jews.”<sup>6</sup>

The Jews were the first to pay the price for this missed integration, but for historical reasons which are due primarily to

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<sup>4</sup> *Le Monde*, 10 July 2004, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Union of Islamic Organizations of France.

<sup>6</sup> Christian friar in Florence at the end of the 15th century, who had millenarian dreams of redemption and kept the city under strict control for three years.

the colonial and pre-colonial history of the Maghreb (the coastal region of northwest Africa once colonized by France: Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria). The Jews are also objects of the cultural attitudes of condescension and often contempt by north African Muslims toward the Jews as former *dhimmis* (protected persons); Only historical research can shed light on the benevolent myth of the Judeo-Maghrebi “Golden Age.” Buried in the shadowy archives, and in the silence of revised memories, there is abundant proof that Moroccan Jews were neglected before the French Protectorate (1912). Contempt for the Jews also stems from the teachings of the Quran, which contains numerous anti-Jewish comments. It is also the result of the social history of a population stricken more than others by unemployment, which fosters resentment of the “rich Jew,” a figure of power and prosperity (“*They have it all, we have nothing*”). The antisemitism which swept through France at the beginning of this century was caused by a combination of the above factors which are themselves the product of the culture of the countries of origin. This occurrence came as a surprise only to the professionally naïve, mainly those who were in a state of euphoria following France’s (“black-white-Arab France”) victory in the football World Cup in the summer of 1998. Yet, for more than fifteen years, this violence had been seeping out of the suburbs where an entire population has been harboring feelings of bitterness caused by the economic and social recession (between 1991 and 1998 in particular), and the collapse of the Arab world (cf. UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] reports from 2002 and 2003), and responded to this turmoil with a re-Islamization movement.

Marginal at the beginning of the 1990s, the observance of the fasting month of Ramadan in French schools has now become a social phenomenon. In some secondary schools, academic life is disrupted for the whole month. The last day of Ramadan is regarded almost as a holiday in many schools. What was for a long time considered a quest for identity has been taken over by Islamists, and in France in particular, by Salafist propaganda. While benevolent “researchers” constantly stress the so-called peace-making role of the Islamic preachers, those responsible for internal security in France have reached exactly the opposite conclusion: the Islamic preachers, many of whom belong to the Salafist Group (cf. above) or to the Tabligh movement, are breaking away from

French institutions and culture. Preaching begins at an early age: in 2003 the French authorities closed two day-nurseries in the suburbs of Paris where Salafist (and radical) preachers were teaching the Quran to children aged between four and six.

This has spawned the escalation of antisemitic hatred on a daily and recurring basis. It has also spawned growing Arab-Muslim pressure on teachers and even on the content itself of their lessons (particularly in the fields of the arts, history, natural sciences, philosophy, and physical education and sports). During the month of Ramadan, non-Muslim teachers are sometimes ordered not to “provoke” their (Muslim) students by drinking coffee in their presence. In some mathematics classes, there are students who refuse to draw particular diagrams in order to avoid reproducing a drawing of a cross. During the school’s cultural activities, others refuse to visit churches and, worse still in their eyes, synagogues. To circumvent any “problem,” the education authorities sometimes take the initiative and give in as they did in 2004 in the Yonne department where a visit to the Vézelay basilica, close to Auxerre, the center of mediaeval Christianity, was cancelled in order to avoid “offending” the Muslim students.

In January 2004, a history teacher in a Parisian suburb was punished by his superiors after parents of Muslim-Arab students lodged a complaint against him. He had declared that Mohammed had “used terror to impose his religion by having almost 900 men of the Jewish tribe of the Qurayzah executed on one day in 627.” Without having been accorded a hearing by his superiors, the teacher was censured for “racism.” Eighty secondary school students had to tear the offending page out of their history exercise books.

School textbooks are at one with this fear. Criticized ten years ago, they now display a reverent submission in all matters pertaining to Islam. This attitude (where intellectual conformism is combined with spineless fear) is corrupting French society. In the name of antiracism modeled on the Durban Conference of 2001, there is now nothing to prevent a witch-hunt of Westerners, Christians, and above all, Jews.

There has long been a desire to regard the school as a place sheltered from the violence of the world. Yet because antisemitism has returned to poison French society, the school is at the heart of

the storm. In a school environment, a live-and-let-live policy regarding antisemitism reflects the failure to take responsibility of a part of the elite which has remained blind to the reality of this “grassroots France”—the working classes, forgotten particularly by the parties of the left whose historically primary objective was, to protect them. There is a close correlation between the antisemitism which is running riot in certain schools and in daily life and its manifestations in public life, when the “comedian” Dieudonné, who incites hatred against Jews, is not bothered by the anti-racism laws despite the complaints lodged against him. The fear of adults confronted with violent words and behavior, such as the vacillation of intellectuals confronted with the Islamic offensive, are henceforth inseparable from this chasm which is separating the people from the elites as never before.<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, the integration of French young people of Maghrebi origin seems to have come to a standstill, and *by the same token*, their rate of unemployment is abnormally high.<sup>8</sup> Yet a social victim is not above the common law, all the more so when the offence s/he commits verges on pogrom-type behavior.<sup>9</sup>

With some courageous exceptions, the political and cultural elites, from both sides of the political spectrum, have long been silent on the subject of the violence perpetrated by a small minority of young people of Maghrebi origin, just as they have long preferred to remain silent about the Islamic movement which,

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<sup>7</sup> In 35 years, whereas the left has governed the country intermittently for 21 years, never has the parliamentary representation of the working classes (workers, employees, and small farmers) been as weak as it is today. In 1967, out of 487 deputies, 51 were employees and workers by origin. In 1997, out of 577 deputies, there were no more than 10 deputies with this background, whereas at the beginning of the century this group constituted 57% of the active population.

<sup>8</sup> In March 2000, the Minister of Employment announced that the rate of unemployment of the best educated working people is 5% for those born in France, 11% for those who have acquired French nationality, but 20% for foreign nationals of Maghrebi origin.

<sup>9</sup> The expression “pogrom-type” (from the Russian pogrom: “destruction,” and by extension anti-Jewish actions) refers to a state of mind which paves the way, verbally at least, for worse violence. The genocidal massacres, those in Armenia at the beginning of the 20th century and those in Rwanda at the end of the same century had something in common—they were sparked by words of hatred.

has infiltrated certain schools.<sup>10</sup> No one can have failed to notice that the number of young Muslim girls wearing head scarves in school is increasing day by day. The fact remains that the failure to take responsibility has prevailed more often than not. In the secondary school in eastern Paris during Ramadan in 2001, students began to chant *suras* from the Koran in class and none of the adults present dared to intervene. This silence undermines successful immigration. The refusal to speak out makes it easier to lump them all together (the “Maghrebis”); it does not help those who wish to distance themselves from the behavior and words which they condemn. Without renouncing the attitude of post-colonial compassion (“*We need to understand them...*”), globalization is swamping each one with the same disapproval. Since 1989, our reluctance to take a stand against the wearing of the Islamic head scarf in school has weakened not only the Republic, but also the cause of the Muslim women whom we have abandoned, just as we once abandoned the Czechs to their fate in order to “save the peace.” The persistent refusal to condemn the young Maghrebis who perpetrate antisemitic acts of violence proves that the Republic, held up as a viaticum, is not intended for them. The refusal to condemn their acts is less a manifestation of tolerance than a sign of contempt.

### **The Facts**

Since autumn 2000, the reports piling up on ministerial desks have been characterized by unrelieved monotony. They state, for example, that in September 2001, in Gagny, Seine Saint-Denis (a northern suburb of Paris), “antisemitic graffiti was painted on the front of the school.” In Mantes-la-Jolie (a western suburb of the capital) in October 2001, “racist comments and Arabic notations were written” on a notice board. In the same month, in Tourcoing (in northern France), a primary school principal discovered antisemitic graffiti on the front door of her school. In November

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<sup>10</sup> In his reports from the heart of French Islamism, the Algerian journalist Mohammed Sifaoui (author of *My assassin “brothers”* [Le Cherche Midi, 2003]) notes in connection with the Parisian immigrant areas of Belleville and Couronnes (which have largely been penetrated by Muslim fundamentalism): “Karim and other ‘brothers’ sarcastically refer to these areas as ‘liberated territories’ or even ‘Islamic states.’ They have to some extent succeeded in setting up ‘Islamic mini-republics’ in the heart of a secular republic” (p. 135).

2001 in a secondary school in Drancy (a northern suburb of Paris), antisemitic graffiti on the doors targeted some of the teachers. In January 2002, in Créteil (an eastern suburb of Paris), the following graffiti appeared: “NLJ” and “BLJ.” An enquiry conducted by the school authorities reveal that these acronyms mean: “Screw the Jews”; “Fuck the Jews.”<sup>11</sup> In March 2002, in Aulnay-sous-Bois (a northern suburb of Paris), swastikas and anti-Jewish slogans addressed to the school principal were painted in the toilets.

After the graffiti come the words which illustrate how antisemitic slurs, barely accepted in public, have become liberated; they are freely used in private, according to the testimony of many young people of both sexes, children of Maghrebi immigrants, who declare themselves “appalled” by what they hear. The liberation of antisemitic language is obvious, in particular since September 2001, while barely ten years ago an anti-Jewish comment was an extremely serious offence. Today, antisemitic insults are hurled by students at other students,<sup>12</sup> at their teachers, at the administration, *every day*. In a suburb of Grenoble, in June 2001, a history-geography teacher was abused by some 5th-year students. He was called a “dirty Jew” (he is not Jewish) and threatened: “If we catch you, we will kill you!” In November 2001, in Villepinte, a northern suburb of Paris, a student shouted “Death to the Jews” when a teacher passed by. He was not punished. In September 2001, in Epinay sur Seine, in the same suburb, a principal was assaulted by parents who threatened her with death while heaping antisemitic abuse on her.

In 2000, in a secondary school in a suburb of Grenoble, the librarian wanted to send a 3rd-year troublemaker to the deputy headmaster. The student refused, yelling: “I’m not going to that Jew!” In February 2002, in Pré Saint Gervais, a northern suburb of the capital, a young Jewish boy was assaulted by a group of young Maghrebis. Insults were flung at him, then his aggressor pointed a knife to his cheek while keeping him at bay. On April 16, 2002, in Paris, a young Jew was assaulted under similar conditions. On May 21, 2002, two 13-year-old girls, students at a religious Jewish

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<sup>11</sup> In Toulouse, for example, in housing estates such as La Reynerie, “Screw your mother” and “Screw the Jew” are linked insults.

<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of October 2001, in a secondary school in the 12th arrondissement of Paris, the class representative (4th year), of Maghrebi extraction, said to a Jewish fellow-student: “Dirty Jew, you and your race should be exterminated!”

school in a Paris suburb, were beaten up by six girls of Maghrebi origin. On June 27 and 28, 2002 in Paris, Jewish school children were taking school exams in a public building. After the exams, some twenty adolescents, most of Maghrebi origin, were waiting to assault the smaller group. At first verbally (“Dirty Yids”), then physically: lacerated lips, bleeding above the eyes, and for one student at least, cranial trauma and hospitalization. These facts go unreported by the press.<sup>13</sup> A toll-free telephone line installed for the general public by the Paris Jewish community receives a daily record of these violent acts. For the time being, we will restrict ourselves to examining the raw facts as they were recounted by teachers and students. There was the instance of the young mathematics teacher (of Jewish origin), fresh out of the Bordeaux teacher training college, who in September 2002 was sent for her first teaching position to the Val de Marne (an eastern suburb of Paris). Absent because of Yom Kippur, her students questioned her the next day: “Yesterday was the day of the Jews [*sic*]. Is that why you weren’t here?” Taken aback, the young teacher replied that she “was at a course.” “Just as well,” sighed part of the class. There was the instance of the music teacher who “negotiated” (this is the commonly used term) with the “class representative” (a young Maghrebi girl) to be allowed to teach gospel music and choral singing, while the Arab part of the class refused to “sing Jesus.” During a “cultural trip” to Italy, some of the young Muslims boycotted visits to churches, and *of course* to synagogues. During a similar trip to Spain, two Maghrebi students refused to visit the Toledo synagogue (“it’s a sin, it’s written in the Quran”), while one boy, also of Maghrebi origin, consented to visit the synagogue, but on condition that he could place his keffiyeh around his face “so as not to breathe in this atmosphere,” he

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<sup>13</sup> During the incidents, the school principal made light of the event. The Jewish students beaten by their Maghrebi “schoolmates” did not turn up for their next exams. The others returned and left under police escort. In five of the incidents, the perpetrators of the violent acts admitted the facts. The case which should have been tried in January 2003 was postponed. The father of one of the Jewish students who accompanied his daughter on the second day, threatened to set the school on fire if “one hair of his child” was touched. The Public Prosecutor decided to take him to court for making the threats. The same Public Prosecutor did not take the aggressors to court for “assault and battery” and decided to take no action in connection with this complaint. As for the Jewish parents, they were later ordered on appeal to pay a heavy fine. Are people trying, in the only way they can, to drive the Jews of France into shutting themselves off from the rest of the world?

explained to his teacher. In the Essonne, to the south of Paris, one young black Muslim called Joelle was “distraught” [*sie*] when she learned the Hebrew origin of her first name: “I don’t want other people to think I’m Jewish,” she told the teacher who tried to reason with her.

“Ordinary” hatred goes something like this.<sup>14</sup> The following are a few examples, enough to impart a flavor of the cold sadness of this waste. In Paris on February 27, 2003, a student in a working-class area heard this cry: “Jews, we will screw you, we will massacre you, you Yids, we will massacre you all!” In Lille, on April 10, 2003 a young Jewish girl on her way to school was caught by four individuals who slapped her about, yelling: “Hitler did not finish what he began, but we will finish his work, and you will end up in the ovens... Dirty whore... Dirty Jew!”<sup>15</sup> On May 2, 2003, a 13-year-old Jewish boy was assaulted by four young Maghrebis who asked him if he was Jewish. When he replied in the affirmative, he was insulted and then violently beaten. He was taken to hospital. On June 23, 2003, a 16-year-old Jewish boy was assaulted on the train by four young Maghrebis. After extorting money from him, the insults began (“You’re a Jew? Dirty Jew?”), then came the blows. The young boy defended himself. One of the aggressors grabbed him from the back and, shouting, placed a knife under his

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<sup>14</sup> On November 28, 2002, in the Beaumarchais de Meaux secondary school, a young Jewish student was beaten up by a Maghrebi schoolmate after a history lesson about the Jews. On December 20, 2002 at the Turgot school in Paris, after being insulted in the middle of the class by a young Maghrebi student, a Jewish student heard her add in front of the teacher who did not intervene: “Hitler should have finished his work and exterminated you.” On January 6, 2003, at the Paul Langevin de Sainte Geneviève des Bois (Essonne) school, a 17-year-old Jewish student was insulted by three Maghrebi “schoolmates” who told him “we will bump you off.” Terrorized, the young boy refused to return to school and lodged a complaint. His parents tried to arrange for him to be transferred to another school. On January 15, 2003 a Jewish student at the Arago school in Paris was attacked by a group of some thirty young Maghrebis who called her not “Dirty Jew” but “Dirty Jude,” using the German word for “Jew.” The child was terrified.

<sup>15</sup> On April 17, 2003, on the train taking him from Sarcelles, a 17-year-old Jew was assaulted by a group of young Maghrebis who called him “Dirty Jew” and threatened him with a screwdriver. On April 27, 2003, four Jewish children aged between 6 and 10 were assaulted coming out of a Parisian gymnasium in the 19th arrondissement. The eldest was called a “Dirty Jew,” and beaten up. On May 22, 2003, a teacher of Jewish origin in a public school in the 18th arrondissement found on the table of a Maghrebi student, graffiti describing her as a “Dirty Jew! We will burn you all, you arseholes!”

throat. No one moved. The aggressors ran away when the Paris train pulled in.

This is everyday life as experienced by a large number of Jewish children and adolescents in the “birthplace of the rights of man.” Becoming ever more familiar, this reality is (fortunately) no longer denied by those who do not wish to hear. These are only the most visible facts as reported to the police or the SPCJ (Jewish Community Protection Service). However, there is the rest, the poisoned climate of insults and hate-filled looks, crude mocking remarks, and daily fear. There is the story of the Jewish child, a 6th-year student, who one Sunday evening admitted that he was afraid to go to history class the next day because “we will study the Jews.” He expected the worst (“I don’t want them to say bad things about my father”) from his “schoolmates of Maghrebi origin.” There was also the case of a 2nd-year student at a Grenoble school in 2000. Believed by her Maghrebi classmates to be an Arab because of her Sephardic Jewish surname, she was invited to join them: “Since you are an Arab like us, we are going to pass the hat round for Mohammed Al Dura.”<sup>16</sup> The young girl was too scared to refuse until the day when the class learned that she was Jewish. That was when her nightmare began. Her parents wanted to remove her from the school, but her teachers, who feared losing one of the school’s (few) very good students, protested.

In Paris in October 2003, at the Montaigne secondary school in an affluent area of the capital, young B, a 6th-year student, was roughed up by two children of Maghrebi origin who “discovered” that he was Jewish when he was absent for Yom Kippur. “All the Jews will disappear, you will be exterminated,” they shouted. The bullying began and lasted for two months. The child was knocked about and beaten up, almost always on his way home from school. He withdrew into himself, refused to speak and often cried in the evenings. He was sent for treatment. The psychiatrist prescribed tranquilizers. One evening at home, he was unable to hide the bruises on his body: once again, his “small schoolmates” had knocked him over and beaten him up. In the end, it was the intervention of a former teacher in whom the child had confided,

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<sup>16</sup> This was the Palestinian child killed in Gaza at the end of September 2000 during the first clashes of the second *intifada*. The death of this child in the arms of his father made headlines around the world.

who solved the problem. Young B. was then transferred to another class. Informed by the psychiatrist, the school doctor declared himself to be “shocked” and alerted the school principal. Two more months elapsed without the perpetrators being punished, since the head teacher was of the opinion that he did not yet have sufficient corroboration of the facts. Yet, in the final analysis, the decision taken by the French authorities in the spring of 2004, in the name of a narrow legalism, pointed to the spinelessness of the republican institutions in the face of Muslim-Arab pressure. Expelled in November 2003 and immediately registered in another school in their area, the two aggressors would eventually return to their original school, decided the Paris administrative tribunal at the end of May 2004. Moreover, the State was ordered to pay 1,000 euros to each of the families of the two aggressors. At the beginning of June 2004, the parents of the Jewish student decided to remove their child from the school.

There are far more incidents in the working-class areas of Paris, but they receive only sparse media coverage. In one secondary school in the east of the capital, in mid-October 2003, young Y. (aged 14), was assaulted by seven “schoolmates” who, after knocking him over, kicked him, shouting: “Go to hell, dirty Jew!” The youth was hospitalized with a broken collarbone. The aggressors, having finally admitted the facts, were banned for one week. Their parents appealed this decision to the Paris education authority which cancelled the punishment. Out of desperation, the school principal and police superintendent, who had diligently followed up this incident, suggested to the victim’s parents that they transfer their son...to a Jewish school.

Here and there, racist and antisemitic insults have become the norm. They no longer cause offence. They are no longer confined to the old-hat “eat like a Jew,” but they now include “to ooj,” meaning “to defraud.” The noun “Jew” need no longer be preceded by the adjective “dirty” as in “Dirty Arab” or “Dirty nigger,” it is an insult on its own. In one school, whatever is well-worn and is fit only for disposal is described as “Jewish.” So, phrases such as “Jewish pencil” and “mazaltov eraser” are in common parlance. Teachers, particularly those of Jewish origin, recount how language is debased to the extent that not only students, but also some of their colleagues, under the guise of condemning the “butcher Sharon,” use antisemitic slurs. This

antisemitism has also reached the University, where the demonization of Zionism, against an equitably shared background of ignorance, rivals simplistic judgments and hotchpotches (Israeli-Jews, Zionism-fascism, etc.). In several universities, in Paris VII and Paris VIII in particular, regular meetings are devoted to “Palestine.” One would seek in vain such diligent assistance for southern Sudan which has been blighted by ethnocide, Dhofar, Tibet, or Kurdistan, and how about the Congo where the five-year civil war has produced two million deaths, without any protests from the Palestinophile progressives.

In the University of Paris VIII (St-Denis) at the end of the academic program, an assistant lecturer (of Jewish origin) was shouted at by two students of Maghrebi origin who informed her that they did not want to have their papers “corrected by a Jew.” In March 2003 in the same university, the General Union of Tunisian Students organized an anti-Zionist exhibit which was sufficiently antisemitic that the vice-chancellor lodged a complaint, and some lecturers recalled the exhibit organized by the Nazis in Paris at the Palais Berlitz in 1941.

In the University of Paris X—Nanterre, many students have noted the increase in anti-Jewish and anti-Western hatred, the proliferation of veils worn by young women and the inflammatory calls in support of Palestine, adjudged the world’s only mirror of chaos. In addition, it is impossible to hold a conference financed by the French taxpayer on the Holocaust, much less on Zionism, a forbidden subject if ever there was one, at this site unless the police are mobilized. This climate of verbal violence is descending more and more frequently into violence or physical threats. Jewish students endure this nightmare in silence (antisemitic insults, all kinds of threats, and sometimes blows) before finally leaving their schools. Only then do they begin to speak out and only then do their teachers discover the magnitude of the waste.

In April–May 2002 during the presidential election campaign, the candidate François Bayrou was greeted in the school residence halls of La Meinau (near Strasbourg in Alsace), by cries of “We want a France without Jews!” In the same year, in the Rhône-Alpes region, a language teacher reported that when she was describing the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, a “group of Maghrebi students began to applaud.” In May 2003, in the northern Paris suburb of St-Denis, a young English teacher

answered a question about his nationality, “French like you.” The student retorted sharply: “I’m not French. You’re calling me a Jew!”

By compiling this (endless) list of incidents, it is easier to see how some young people of Maghrebi origin seem to be preoccupied by the “Jews,” even obsessed by the myths of the “Jewish conspiracy” and “Jewish influence.” In 2004, in the quiet town of Angoulême in the heart of the Charente, where the “Jewish community” numbers no more than some tens of inhabitants, the Jews remain an obsessive reference for part of the disinherited Maghrebi youth. “For the Jews, the community is well thought of; not for us Muslims,” noted Maroual, a student aged 22. “Why did they put all the Arabs in the poor immigrant areas? They did it deliberately.”<sup>17</sup> For these young people of Arab origin, the evidence is out there, incontrovertible, in the very heart of the West: “On 11 September, the Jews escaped the attacks. Why?” People understood who was behind that catastrophe. One of the young people summed it all up: “The Jews are like gods. No one can touch them. Too many people are defending the Jews right now.”<sup>18</sup>

In Lyons in October 2003, an economics teacher was teaching his class about the different statuses of a business and chose for this purpose to compare the status of the television channels. One student interrupted him: “All that is bullshit, because everyone know who heads the TV channels!” The teacher responded, unsure of himself: “Who?” Answer: “The Jews of course.” The class agreed as though it were obvious. In November 2003 in Grenoble, a final-year student wrote in his philosophy paper that the Jews “are the most dangerous people in the world.” At the same time, the press published a poll which revealed that 59% of Europeans believe the state of Israel to be “the most dangerous state for world peace.”

This omnipresent antisemitism also takes the form of a refusal to learn, and/or a challenge to Jewish teachers. This is evident when an adolescent of Maghrebi origin, a good student, who crossed his arms, deliberately “refusing to make a note of a

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<sup>17</sup> *Le Monde*, 6 July 2004.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

correction of homework about the Holocaust.<sup>19</sup> “Tomorrow I’m not going to class; the history teacher is Jewish. I’m not interested,” declared this final-year student from the suburb of Lyons, of French-Algerian parents in intellectual professions. Jewish teachers are harassed slyly, as was this teacher in a Parisian suburb who wrote in February 2003: “Sterilizing courses has become the only way to have peace. Last year, a Muslim student aged 17 years and six months, who did not wear a veil, refused to have her paper corrected by me.” Incidents are sometimes more violent. As in the case of what happened to this plastic arts teacher in a fifth-year class consisting entirely of students of Maghrebi origin (who knew that she was Jewish). After the inevitable “fuck Israel!”; “Me, I fuck Jews!” etc. “Hitler was right, they should all be gassed!” she recounted: “One week later, the students came into the classroom oddly quieter than usual. At the end of the class, they began to hurl paper pellets, erasers, pens, everything they could lay their hands on. I had to crouch behind my desk to avoid injury. The students left the classroom except for two of them who were sickened by the ambush. As they left, the others shouted: “We’ve had our intifada!”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> One moment earlier, this same young girl, who wears the veil outside school, had declared during the discussion: “According to my father, in Morocco, the Jews who knew their place got on well with us.” Anyone familiar with the longstanding *dhimmitude* of the Moroccan Jews will appreciate the true value of this comment.

It is this latent antisemitism which appeared in this text written by a final-year student of Maghrebi origin, in November 2003 in a Grenoble school. For homework about the philosophical and political questions arising from the Holocaust, she wrote: “As far as I am concerned, this event has nothing to do with me. I am quite well aware of what happened, but I think we should stop talking about it, this event only brings to mind revolting memories, and moreover it is becoming outdated.... The never-ending talk about this event will make it something completely normal and human for me; I would like to emphasize that I am NOT AT ALL concerned by this massacre, I would not go so far as to say that I am in favor of Hitler and his ideologies, but this is beginning to get heavy. I also think that this gave the Jewish people desire for revenge; whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger; the Nazi regime did not succeed in wiping out this people, who nevertheless built a state called Israel; and today the state of Israel is not nothing.”

<sup>20</sup> On March 10, 2004, six French intellectuals (including four Nobel laureates) published a collective letter which is a veritable wakeup call: “Jewish children at risk.” The text concludes with these words:

“Seriously uneasy, we address ourselves to the teachers, the school principals, the school guards, the schools in France. Do not allow antisemitism to corrupt the schools of the Republic.

We call on them:

Is this an “upsurge” of a “new antisemitism,” or above all, of “the spirit of the time” as candidly admitted by the child who succumbed to it? “What is racism? That was the question of the day asked in my son’s class (he’s 10 years old),” recounted the father of one student. With a stroke of the pen, one student replied: “Racism, that’s the Jews, they don’t like the blacks!” This reply angered the teacher. Sociable and outgoing, the child was, however, a good student, one not given to misbehavior. Where did this sentence come from? He didn’t know. “It just came out!” he said. Are his parents to blame? They were called in. Above suspicion, unraveling the story, seeking to understand. Where did the incident come from? Was this to be the latest invention of the antisemites? Insinuations made by people who know no better? The result of a comedian’s venomous buffoonery? One can get lost in assumptions. Finally the good student gave in and said: “It comes from the spirit of the time!” Outside, the sky was heavy and brooding, hostile. As usual it was the fault of a cyclonic depression over our heads, threatening! As usual...<sup>21</sup>

It is now almost fifteen years since the teaching of the Holocaust first revealed these trends inside schools. Since the beginning of the 1990s, trainee teachers have regularly quoted antisemitic comments made by students of Maghrebi origin during history classes about the genocide of the Jews. Yet that which could once be considered an isolated fact has now become a tidal wave. Antisemitic incidents occur every day. In some classes, the mere mention of Israel is enough to cause a hubbub. If it is sometimes difficult to teach the lesson about Alfred Dreyfus, the

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To take action in order to collectively denounce and publicly punish antisemitic acts and comments witnessed or judged by them, so that each person, inside and outside school, can measure their determination in this undoubted struggle for civic equality;

To cede, in their classes, no part of the memory of the Holocaust which is also our national memory, to no one and for no reason whatsoever; but on the contrary, to redouble their efforts to transmit its painful lesson, stained with horror and inhumanity, to the young people of our country who, more than ever, must combat it so that it in turn becomes theirs;

To respect each student, whatever his or her origins, his or her nationality, religion or opinions, in the Republic of France.

The text is signed by H el ene Ahrweiler, Etienne-Emile Beaulieu, Georges Charpak, Claude Cohen-Tannoudji, Jean Dausset et Fran ois Jacob.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from a Parisian teaching assistant, Fran ois de la Chevalerie, published in *Le Monde*, 18 May, 2004.

lesson on the Holocaust can also cause an uproar, a protest, where even the crudest negationist or antisemitic comments are made openly. A history teacher in a Parisian suburb quoted the “Jewish myths of Nazi propaganda which some Maghrebi students take malicious pleasure in mentioning: the wealth of Jews, the Jewish distinctive identity which is considered to be unhealthy and at any rate, strange.” Close to Grenoble, a French teacher noted that the only opposition to the study of Primo Levi’s book, *If This Is A Man*, came from two students of Maghrebi origin: “We don’t like these Jew stories.” In March 2001 in a suburb of Lyons, a third-year student, a recent immigrant from Algeria, declared to his French teacher: “We like history at the moment because we’re doing Hitler and he killed off many Jews. So we like him.” There was a stunned silence, said the teacher, who for a moment thought that he had misheard, when a second student, also of Maghrebi origin, shouted out “Death to the Jews!”<sup>22</sup> Lessons are sometimes disputed in an unusual manner. In Montreuil (a Parisian suburb), in the autumn of 2003, some fifteen-year-old students challenged the reality of the Holocaust and asked their teacher for permission to leave the classroom in order to request information from the imam, the only one, they said, who “tells the truth.”

These remarks mirror family discussions where, according to numerous accounts, anti-Jewish hatred is at an all-time high. A French teacher in Seine Saint-Denis, a writer of children’s stories, R. H. described an incident which occurred at the end of January 2002 in a secondary school in the south of France when she was invited there to talk about her work: “During a discussion of one of my novels about the Holocaust, a student asked me: “What is your ethnic origin?” I answered: “Jewish.” I then heard him say in a low voice: ”Bring on the guns!” Stunned and believing that I had misheard, I asked him to repeat what he had said. He refused and then eventually complied, adding with a big grin on his face: “That was a joke.” The truth is that this “joke” is repeated in secondary school after secondary school, in particular in those containing a sizeable minority of students of Maghrebi origin.<sup>23</sup> Numerous

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<sup>22</sup> The two students were banned for one week.

<sup>23</sup> Another example of a “joke,” told by this teacher of law and economics in a vocational school. Not Jewish and inflexible on the questions of racism, antisemitism, and sexism, her reputation was sealed. In October 2003, two days later,

teachers tell how, after September 11, 2001, the slogans “*Death to the Jews, Death to the USA*” proliferated, as well as drawings depicting the Twin Towers on fire. After a lesson on the Holocaust, a history teacher in a Parisian suburb described how a young boy of Maghrebi origin shouted: “Hitler would have made a good Muslim.”

Jewish children are leaving public schools in greater and greater numbers. While some parents certainly wish to add a Jewish dimension to their children’s education, it is insecurity which is prompting most of the transfers of Jewish children to the private (denominational) sector. In Lyons, a student at the ORT vocational Jewish school recounted how he joined the school in the middle of the year (2001–2002) because the “Arab students insulted me and criticized me for the policies of Ariel Sharon. One day, in the library, I opened the dictionary to the page of flags. The Israeli flag had been crossed out and the picture torn.” Another student from the Lyons ORT school, who had also joined in mid-year, told how in his previous school, Maghrebi students would sing to him: “One little Jew, in a concentration camp, one whiff of gas, and off they go.”

This violence also crystallizes around Jewish schools and Jewish places, as regularly recorded by the police authorities. In Lyons, for example, in January 2002 an ORT teacher was assaulted by four youths of Arab origin who repeated three times: “Dirty Jew!” Young people, students in Jewish schools in Lyons and the surrounding areas, are insulted by young people of Maghrebi origin who yell at them: “Long live Bin Laden! Death to the Jews!”

At the beginning of April 2002, some Jewish adolescents from Bondy (a suburb to the north of Paris), members of the Maccabi sports club, were assaulted in the stadium where they do their regular training: “We will kill you all, dirty Jews,” heard one of the youngsters who was beaten and later hospitalized. Following the assault, the Jewish sportsmen decided to train elsewhere. Fear produces results: several Jewish students in the area requested transfers to another school or admission into a Jewish school, bolstering this “withdrawal,” for which, because of the feeling of

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upon entering this first-year class, she found the word “CREMATORIA” written in capital letters on the blackboard.

having been abandoned by the authorities, no one can now blame the Jews of France.<sup>24</sup>

Jewish schools now budget for costly security equipment. They use security guards and the police have increased their presence outside their buildings. Jewish children are continually being made aware of the “risks,” because in the France of today it is risky to wear a kippa or Star of David pendant. One of the children questioned by the weekly *Actualité juive*, said: “When I go through this park on my way home, I hide my *tzitzit*.<sup>25</sup> I try not to be conspicuous and I go through the park very quickly. And every evening, I hope nothing will happen the next day.”<sup>26</sup> The daily newspaper *Le Monde* noted on January 7, 2003 in connection with Jewish children going to the Talmud Torah lesson organized by France’s liberal Jewish movement: “Sunday 5 January, 2003 in Paris, Jewish children leaving the synagogue in the rue Gaston-de-Caillavet put their kippas in their pockets before going on their way.”<sup>27</sup> Since 2001, Jewish schoolchildren are enjoined to wear caps to hide their kippas and “not to react to insults.”<sup>28</sup> Each one tries to control the fear which in some takes the form of a vague feeling of insecurity and in others, moments of anxiety similar to the child who explained: “I’m often scared that they will attack me and the school. They’ve already burned it twice in the same place. It’s very sad.” At the beginning of June 2004, one 17-year-old Jew was knifed as he left his religious school by a man in his thirties, of Moroccan origin (he was arrested some days later), who shouted: “*Allah Akbar!*” The youth, seriously wounded in the lung, underwent several operations. In July 2004, the annual seminar of teachers in Jewish schools in France, organized by the André Neher Institute (Paris), scheduled among its training modules one on assaults and organization of security.

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<sup>24</sup> These reactions are not confined to France. In Antwerp where a “European Arab League” has been set up, leaders of the Jewish community acknowledge withdrawal reflexes dictated by fear, some members of the Jewish community in their confusion even going so far as to feel a new and unnatural sympathy for the Flemish extreme right, the *Vlaams Blok* (cf. *Libération*, 16 Dec. 2002).

<sup>25</sup> The fringes at the bottom of the prayer shawl worn by religious male Jews under their clothes.

<sup>26</sup> *Actualité juive*, no. 747 (9 May 2002): 34.

<sup>27</sup> *Le Monde*, 7 Jan. 2003.

<sup>28</sup> In September 2003, The Chief Rabbi of France, Joseph Sitruk, recommended that children do this.

This is the “birthplace of the rights of man,” a country where children recount their daily fears in resignation, where adolescents conceal their Jewishness under caps, where girls hide any Jewish jewelry considered to be “provocative,” and where a minority are asked to look down in the presence of “young people” enraged by the “aggressive policies of Sharon.”

We are told that this is nothing more than a “temporary loss of control” by “disadvantaged youngsters” who have not been integrated into French society. These youngsters frequently encounter discrimination when they look for jobs, for housing, and for ways of spending their leisure time. Yet, even when it is presented in this way, this explanation remains incomplete as long as it obscures other factors such as the ideological antisemitism which is endemic to some Maghrebi immigrants. In January 2002, the lead singer of the Toulouse group Zebda, Majib Cherfi, declared in an interview with the *Nouvel Observateur*:

When I was young, we didn't like Jews. My parents were antisemitic, as people are in the Maghreb. The word “Jew” in Berber is an insult. It was nothing to do with Palestine, or with politics, that's just how it was. We didn't like Jews, except for those we knew.”<sup>29</sup>

Did the journalist cut out some of Cherfi's comments? No! Many young Maghrebis corroborate them and confirm that in the Maghreb, there is a longstanding tradition of anti-Judaism, often born of a contempt which is frequently exacerbated by outbreaks of violence. This is the antisemitism, familiar to all historians of north Africa and the Arab world in general, which was introduced into the French republic by the immigration of Muslim Arabs.<sup>30</sup>

A public opinion poll conducted at the beginning of 2002 by Sofres among 400 people aged between 15 and 24 reported this sometimes obsessive antisemitism.<sup>31</sup> To the question: “Do you believe that Jews have too much influence in the areas of economics and finance?”: 22% of all respondents replied “yes,” compared with 35% of young Maghrebis who gave the same reply.

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<sup>29</sup> *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 1942.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Emmanuel Brenner, “France, take care not to lose your soul...” *Social fracture and anti-Semitism in the Republic* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Union des Étudiants Juifs de France, SOS Racisme, *Les Antiféjuifs* [AntiJews] (Calmann-Lévy, 2002).

“Do Jews have too much influence in the media?”: 21% replied “yes,” compared with 38% of young Maghrebis. “Do Jews have too much influence in politics?”: “Yes” for 18% of all young people compared with 24% of Maghrebi origin. However, it was the question relating to intimate life which best illustrated this divide: “Would you consider living with a Jew?”: 8% of all young people replied “no,” compared with 24% of young Maghrebis who gave the same reply.

### **Antisemitic Factors**

#### *The Islamic Upsurge*

Is this merely an identity withdrawal caused by disorganized movements? Or are we, on the other hand, witnessing a concerted political offensive? During a conference entitled “Religions, Secularity, the Rights of Man” held in October 2003 in Grenoble, the representative of Islam admitted that in Islamic-Arab countries, “the rights of man was an absent notion,” adding, however, that “when the rights of God are respected, those of men are respected as well.” For Islam to adopt these values, he concluded, it would first be necessary to “deconstruct the West.” In Mulhouse, young people of Maghrebi origin recently made the following remarks to journalists about families in favor of wearing the veil: “Their families encourage them to wage war in school.” Noria, aged 20, wore the veil between the ages of 14 and 20. She asserted that her “parents wanted to be stronger than France.”<sup>32</sup> It is this hushed repudiation of “France” which accounts for the reactions of a group of Maghrebi high-school students who, in the autumn of 2003, replied to the arts teacher who wanted them to study Marcel Pagnol’s *Le Château de ma mère* (My mother’s castle): “That’s not our culture, it’s too French.” The repudiation of the West, rejection of France, and hatred of Jews all play a role in this atmosphere. In a secondary school in the north of Paris, in the Islam section of his exercise book, a 5th-year student (12–13 years) wrote that “the Muslims respect and protect Jews and Christians. Martyrs go to paradise.” In another secondary school in a northwestern suburb of Paris, a 5th-year student wrote about a 14th-century Turkish engraving depicting a horseman: “Arab

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<sup>32</sup> *Libération*, 10 Dec. 2003.

horsemen are valiant fighters who love and have faith in God, and they are *mujaheddin* who want to be martyrs [*sic*] in paradise.”<sup>33</sup> “Is it possible to talk of truth outside the sciences?” asked a philosophy teacher in Lyons in October 2003. After 30 minutes of talking, she was abruptly interrupted: “None of that means anything,” shouted a student, “science and religion should not be on opposing sides; the Quran is scientific.” Most of the students of Maghrebi origin agreed with this statement. A few refuted it. The teacher noted that the non-Maghrebis did not even intervene.

Other accounts demonstrate the relatively concerted aspect of this offensive. In Metz, in October 2003, during a class about the roundups of the Jews under the Occupation, a student of Turkish origin made some antisemitic remarks. Summoned to the principal, he explained that these “ideas” had been suggested to him the February before, when, during the school holidays, he was with an “organization of young Muslims.” The “obvious” wearing of political signs such as the Palestinian keffiyeh and T-shirts bearing the Algerian flag or slogans praising the “Algerian forces” [*sic*] are also part of this climate. The many teachers who are opposed to the wearing of political signs supporting the state of Israel do, however, take care not to intervene in these instances.

Some teachers find it more and more difficult to give classes on French law. “As a gesture of empathy with them,” explained a teacher in a technical school in Paris, “and for pedagogical purposes, I find myself taking more and more examples from public life in the Maghreb. When I do this, they understand. I therefore have to do it each time and I continually ask myself whether this is desirable.” The same teacher recounted how in the spring of 2003, she had to deal with a veil incident which she thought had been organized from outside: “In my three classes (of students whose average age is 18), I had to deal with some eight students who wanted to wear the veil. What surprised me was that they would behave in the same way between going into the classroom and the beginning of registration, they would put their black shawls on their heads and stare at me, then remove them just before the moment when I was about to start registration when they knew I would ask for their removal. The stereotypical manner of their behaviour led me to think that someone from outside

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<sup>33</sup> Upon inquiry, the child was assisted by his 21-year-old brother.

must have instructed them to do this.” In the autumn of 2003, this teacher encountered the same problem: “The stereotypical nature of the arguments (of the students) and their size (approximately half of the class) made me think this was not an individual but a collective initiative, one which had even been directed remotely. In September 2003 I had to face a real riot in which, shouting, they attempted to make me admit that the Islamic veil should be adopted and those who refused to do so should be condemned.... The following week, going into the same law class, I had the unpleasant surprise of seeing my students trying to bring into my class an adult aged around 30 who “wanted to hear the lesson.” I managed to prevent him. I asked myself how this adult could have come into the school and who he was. I have my suspicions!”

This Islamic pullback has been gestating for more than ten years, as indicated by the proliferation of prayer halls or the increase in the wearing of the Islamic scarf. The integration rates have proved to be fertile soil for a “ressourcement” or quest for identity handled by the imams from certain mosques who, explained a Muslim from Lyons, “continually repeat to young people that the French do not like the Arabs, that they detest Islam.”<sup>34</sup> It was from these circles that the terrorists who operated in France in 1995 were recruited. It was this fundamentalism which produced those who applied to go to Pakistan or Saudi Arabia for training in the Quranic schools, or the training centers, for an “extremely difficult” operation, particularly in Iraq in 2003–2004. The former Euro-MP Djida Tazdait recalled the community control in the housing estates and emphasized the decline in the status of girls and women in these places. The deterioration in the status of women which is closely linked to the upsurge of antisemitism was an early-warning sign of a more general decline.

On September 12, 2001, the day following the anti-American attacks, classes in some secondary schools witnessed joyful scenes. One arts teacher from a school to the south of Paris reported: “It was similar to the events after France won the football World Cup in 1998.” There was exultation. Graffiti flowered on the walls and staircases from the morning of September 12: “Death to the USA” appeared alongside “Death to the Jews.” There was a student, noted a history teacher from a northern Paris suburb, who was

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<sup>34</sup> *Libération*, 10 Dec. 2003.

drawing towers on fire and a swastika which had blotted out the Israeli flag. In a school in Metz-Nancy, a report from October 2001 stated:

A number of head teachers have remarked on a deterioration in the school atmosphere in the past two weeks. These are schools where Muslim students represent a significant percentage of the school's population.... The situation is very tense, there are incidents every day: racist insults, disrespectful remarks to adults, constant acts of aggression among students, offensive graffiti (including against the French State), rejection of all authority."

Everything happened as though, far from provoking the expected attrition, the anti-American massacre had been perceived in certain quarters as an authorization to go further once this first "victory" had been recorded. People remarked that it was from this juncture and not from the start of the Palestinian *intifada*, one year later, that the "liberation of antisemitic speech" in France can be dated.

#### *The New Ideology-based Consensus*

The new intellectual conformity has turned the Israeli-Palestinian drama into the sacred Cause of an orphan humanity of the *Grand Soir*. Heirs of the bloodless pogrom that was the Durban conference (September 2001),<sup>35</sup> (UN World Conference against Racism) a number of its zealots are paving the way for the "one superfluous State on earth."<sup>36</sup>

The former colonized people of the Maghreb have assumed the role of *victim*. In addition, the West, with its permanent feelings of guilt about the Third World, allows the entire Muslim-Arab world to present itself as victim, from generation to generation in a tried and tested scenario already familiar in Palestine, where for fifty-six years or three generations, refugee status has been *hereditary*.

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<sup>35</sup> Moreover, ignorance of the subject, of the history of Palestine as well as of Zionism (since the middle of the 19th century) feeds the most simplistic clichés, consequently those which are potentially the most criminal. In Orléans, according to the same source, a trainee history-geography teacher explained to his students in a class about "Palestine" that the Palestinians have lived in Palestine for 3,000 years, whereas the Jews are merely recent usurpers (some fifty years).

<sup>36</sup> Remark made by a history-geography teacher to everyone within earshot, heard in the teachers' room of an Orléans school, as reported by a colleague: "In any case, nothing has gone right since the creation of Israel."

French “progressive circles” (particularly many teachers) have made this their vulgate. This accounts for the trends in many schools. Their attention closely focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (in reality Israeli-Arab), many teachers introduce this topical issue in the form of “discussions” in which the Jewish State—and by extension Zionism—are systematically discredited and delegitimized.

Confronted with antisemitic incidents, the academic authorities have for several years adopted a low profile. In many instances, they first attempted to hush up the facts and suppress the details to the point where the teachers were often the last to know of the violence that had occurred in their schools.

Failure to take responsibility also led several teachers to refuse to tackle “problem subjects”: the history of the Jews taught in the 6th form, and the Holocaust in the 3rd and 1st forms. In Toulouse, a philosophy teacher who teaches the history of the Holocaust proposed to a history-teacher colleague that they work together. He was refused: “No, you see, I taught this class last year and when I started to talk about the racist ideologies of the 19th century, there was an uproar; they didn’t want to hear about antisemitism. So this year, I would prefer it if you would deal with that subject. Especially at the beginning of the year, that would harm our relationship immediately. In any case, my class about the Holocaust takes up half a page: the difference between a concentration camp and an extermination camp and a text about Wannsee.”

It was long the rule rather than the exception to deny the existence of violence. In 2001 in an Agen secondary school, an inspector, of Jewish origin, was “discovered” by a young student of Maghrebi origin, then harrassed by a group (“Yid girl, murderer of Palestinians, we will kill you!”). The principal, who wanted to “handle the matter internally” notified neither the local education authority nor the families of the aggressors. He only summoned the students to reprimand them. The insults and threats then redoubled in intensity (“Yid girl,” “You told on us”). The young inspector sank into a depression.

“It’s better not to discuss it”: that was the message from the Ministry of National Education about the need for interreligious tolerance, although the minute’s silence dedicated to the victims of September 11, 2001 was sometimes not brought to the attention of

the students in order to “avoid upsetting their sensibilities” [*sic*]. The desire of some teachers to appease, similar to that of some administrators, sometimes went still further.<sup>37</sup> On September 2, 2002, the day before the beginning of the new school year, a history-geography teacher in a suburb north of Paris suggested to his colleagues that they invite Ida Grinspan, a Jewish Auschwitz survivor to the school.<sup>38</sup> Many teachers were opposed to the idea: “No way! We have many Arab students here, we don’t want trouble!” They did, however, add to their astounded colleague: “If you want to invite a non-Jewish survivor, that’s fine by us.”<sup>39</sup>

As soon as the question of “Palestine” arises, some teachers lose all inhibition. The “attacks are legitimate,” explained a French teacher (of Maghrebi origin) in a Paris vocational school, “while urging his students to participate in the demonstration of March 22”<sup>40</sup> (reported by a student in March 2003).<sup>41</sup> In Paris, in January 2003, in a homework assignment about “Equality in the world today,” a 5th-year student took down dictation from his teacher: “Inequality of religious rights: e.g., Israel, Sudan.” Those who are familiar with how the Sudanese government directed the genocide by starving the Christian and animist people of southern Sudan will appreciate the comparison. After September 11, 2001, some teachers justified the terrorism which had just afflicted the United States. In the teachers’ room, a French instructor from Paris reported, a colleague described how he had just explained to his students that while sympathizing with the victims, one also had to wonder about the terrorist states which were the cause of the problems. To illustrate his point, he mentioned the state of Israel.

The school is the magnifying glass of a nation’s crisis. In its heart, the teaching environment, socially weakened by its declining

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<sup>37</sup> Impossible not to quote the remarks of the Rector of the Paris Mosque, M. Dalil Boubakeur: “The West has dug its grave with its own teeth” (*Vingt minutes*, 18 Oct. 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Ida Grinspan, in collaboration with *Le Monde* journalist Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, wrote *J’ai pas pleuré* (I did not cry) (Robert Laffont, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Very active in the Memorial Museum of the Maison d’Izieu, Bertrand Poirot-Delpech recently recounted how at the end of a school visit, while praising the quality of the exhibits, a teacher “speaking as a friend” gave him the following advice: “Don’t emphasize the Jewish origin of the victims.”

<sup>40</sup> Against the Allied intervention in Iraq in March 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Information provided by the Jewish Community Protection Service of Paris.

status, often appears to support the victim ideology which transforms Jews into assassins of Palestinians. This is the ideology which, in a French textbook published in 2003, uses a long AFP dispatch and an article extracted from it by the newspaper *Ouest-France* on July 8, 2002.<sup>42</sup> At the end of a text describing how young West Bank schoolchildren find it difficult to take their exams because they have to negotiate Israeli army roadblocks (a virtual war situation caused by the occupation and the attacks on civilians), the authors give the students the following exercises:

#### Reading workshop

1. With assistance from the teacher-researcher, carry out a study of the situation in the West Bank: what is an “occupied territory”? By whom are the Palestinians “occupied”?
2. Reread the text and make a note of the lexical field of the war. Give concrete details of the occupation: how is it translated into the daily life of the Palestinians?
3. Why, in this country, has the School remained so important? Explain the thinking of Ala Abou Safia in the last paragraph .

#### Speaking

1. Based on the documentary research on the West Bank, prepare an oral presentation of a few minutes about the current situation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
2. Role-playing: in groups of four, reproduce a meeting of two young people from the Al Amaari camp with two Israeli guards; the two young Palestinians explain that they need to leave the prison to take their exams. Research the arguments of each side in advance.

#### Reading workshop

Write a letter to Ala Abiyou Safia, asking him to continue his resistance and not to give up hope.”

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<sup>42</sup> Editions Delagrave.

Closely coupled with the pounding from the media, this insistence of the pedagogical authorities on trotting out these hackneyed theories causes criticism of the Israeli government to morph into criticism of the state itself, eventually insinuating that the existence of this country causes more problems than it solves, and that its disappearance (which in reality “no one wishes” declare the chorus of critics in unison) would iron out some difficulties. In the context of a private meeting, this spirit of the time once prompted a senior official of the French Republic to envisage, without visible emotion, the disappearance of the Jewish state. In November 2003, this same spirit of the time taught us that in the European Union, Israel is considered by 59% of respondents to be “the most dangerous state for world peace” (cf. above). This strange poll admittedly confused countries and conflict areas, and the responses were locked in by a predetermined list. Nevertheless, by turning the state of Israel into a major obsession of the West (there are more permanent correspondents in Israel-Palestine than in the whole of the African continent), delegitimization is on the way.

A part of the teaching environment is daily immersed in this ideology-shaped consensus. In the French Initiative Committee of the European Social Forum (November 2003), among 250 organizations, the presence of some twenty associations with links to Arab communities and pro-Palestinian groups in France was noted. In particular, three Islamic groups: Muslim Presence (Tariq Ramadan), Collective of Muslims of France, and Islamic Relief France which has five representative offices in Gaza and the West Bank. Buttressed by the rejection of imperialism and hatred of Israel, this tactical choice of the ultra-left consists of seeing in the French suburbs a breeding ground for tomorrow’s forces. Others make the same political calculation. All will one day play a part in transforming the Jews of France into the “tinderbox of the Republic.”

Deliberately cultivated, the obsession with the “Palestinian cause” has invaded schools. People from outside, with no qualifications as historians or history teachers, are frequently invited to express their thoughts on these matters. In 2001 in an Orléans school, the principal invited a psychiatrist to talk to students of different levels about “violence.” The doctor allowed the adolescents to express themselves freely and let violent

comments and even gestures go unremarked. The Israeli-Arab conflict soon became the central issue of the “debate.” The students of Maghrebi origin had no patience for Israel, reported one of the teachers who was present at this meeting. “The United States are behind all that,” declared one of the students. Forgetting his neutrality, the psychiatrist (of Maghrebi origin) assured his audience that the American Congress is “infiltrated by the rich Jewish lobby.” Challenged by one of the teachers, the doctor replied that as an opponent of Muslim fundamentalism, he was “above suspicion.” In November 2002, in a Parisian school, a teacher discovered in the teachers’ room a poster calling on colleagues to “celebrate Ramadan,” in other words, to dine together and donate the money saved by the two missed meals (since the teachers were implicitly requested to fast) to the Committee for Support of Palestine. In Grenoble, in the same month, one lunch time, in the middle of Ramadan, a “meeting of solidarity with Palestine” was organized by two teachers from a school in the city centre. After a simplistic introduction, the students were given the floor. There was an outburst, particularly from the students of Maghrebi origin who were there en masse owing to Ramadan: “Why two states since the Arabs were there first? The Jews should leave!” “Suicide attacks are legitimate because the perpetrators have no hope.” The organizers suggested a boycott of Israeli products. One student called for a more balanced position and declared that he favoured the existence of the two states. There was uproar. Two groups of students of Maghrebi origin yelled out threats: “He’s a Jew, we will finish him off”. In this witch-hunting atmosphere,<sup>43</sup> some teachers eventually

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<sup>43</sup> This is the same poisonous climate described by this history teacher in a secondary school in the center of Paris after publication (Sept. 2002) of the book coordinated by Emmanuel Brenner, *Les Territoires perdus de la République* [The Lost Territories of the Republic]: “A secondary school in Paris, better than others according to some adults. Some adolescent provocations, scarf for the girls, a full veil on the day of the mock baccalaureate, and the keffiyeh widespread, but there is good camaraderie among the students and the “culture of republican openness” is guaranteed by the administration. Yet, by way of example, it is more and more difficult to teach the United States in geography lessons. In the report of the last school administration council, in the “secularity” column, teachers mention difficulties arising in philosophy and life and earth sciences classes. Until the afternoon in January 2003, when a colleague, talking to me, becomes aware of the antisemitic nature of a caricature drawn on a corridor wall. I go up to see and the caricature is there, remarkable: a face with two eyes and an enormous nose and under this drawing worthy of a revisited *Stürmer*, there is a first name and a class, that of a child in the

drew a parallel between the Holocaust and the *Nakba* (exodus of part of the Palestinian population in 1948).<sup>44</sup>

The antisemitism prevalent in France is inseparable from the social crisis which is undermining the country. It is also inseparable from the shock caused by the people who have been immigrating for thirty years from the former French colonies, particularly from the Maghreb. This is the backdrop for a French unease where the national identity is hesitantly trying to find itself by ethnicizing the misery on the outskirts of the cities in what “newspeak” calls “no-law areas.” This phrase leaves one wondering whether a situation where the law no longer makes sense is not the response of a *paper citizenship*.

Catalyst of resentment, crystallizer of social pathologies, and condensed from the most subliminal phobias, antisemitism reflects the sorry state of the French civic and social fabric. Schools leave

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school who has been singled out for condemnation.” (Claire Pontchartrain, certified history teacher in Paris. The *Stürmer* was the Nazi newspaper managed by Julius Streicher whose violently antisemitic and obscene caricatures were one of its specialities.).

<sup>44</sup> Added to this lack of thought of some of the teachers which paves the way for the enemies of the Republic, is the study in secondary school of questionable books in which some expressions, even when repositioned in the context of a novel, can be interpreted literally by adolescents who are hypersensitive to this subject. This is the case with the book of the young Italo-Egyptian Randa Ghazi, *Rêver la Palestine* (Dreaming of Palestine) (Flammarion, 2002). Aged fifteen, the author acknowledges that she drew most of the inspiration for her book from Arab television, which in Egypt, the country of her birth, broadcast in November 2002 *Cavaliers sans monture*, [Horsemen without mounts] a series adapted from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The 41-episode series was sold to 22 Muslim countries. Relayed by cable and satellite, the film was broadcast in Europe. On December 15, 2002, the French cable operator Noos scheduled it for broadcasting. In a country containing the largest Arab-Muslim community in Europe, certain sentences in the book, even when read with caution and inserted into the context of the novel, and respecting the appropriate distance between narrator and narration, are worrying: “The Jews are a damned people” (p. 77), “Kill them wherever you come across them!” (p. 165). “The concentration camps,” declares a protagonist, “no, don’t look around for them, you won’t see them, these camps are in the minds of the Jews who head an impostor government, who recreate the delirious dreams of a German chancellor...” (p. 141). About the death of the young Mohammed Al-Doura, killed in the Gaza Strip in the first days of the second intifada, one of the narrators says: “I think back to 30 September last year, when this child Mohammed Al-Doura was killed and when the soldier who killed him was interviewed, he said that he had spared the father so that he would suffer, that’s what he said, “I spared the father to make him suffer” (p. 180). In response to the protests which unfortunately only came from Jews, the head of the Legal Department of Flammarion publications, M. Henri Bourget, replied: “It is a very beautiful book, with a balance between Israelis and Palestinians.”

12% of illiterates on the fringes of society. 160,000 young people leave school every year without qualifications. Among the 32 countries of the OECD, France ranks only 15th in reading performance. UNDP data which accorded France 2nd place in 1991 only accorded it 17th place in 2002. While it produced 9% of world patents in 1985, it produced only 6% in 2002. The political disarray illustrated by a significant increase in electoral abstentions and extremist votes comes on top of this gradual decline like a final grade.

Antisemitism in the school environment is consequently part of this general disintegration. Also part of this crisis is the return of sexism and anti-feminist attitudes which we believed (naively) to be things of the past. Those who attack Jews, or who “hunt queers” after the Parisian Gay Pride every June, also attack women. The brutality of the encounter often has its roots in a masculine culture which employs domestic brutality and street aggression as a means of releasing the tensions born of an often repressive society. So for example, the academic and social lack of progress of some Maghrebi boys, rendered confident by the privileges conferred on them from birth, is transformed into violence against girls and women, against homosexuals and Jews. The ingredients of fascist violence combine, mixing the social resentment, masculine frustration and racial hatred which become the sole response to disillusionment with the world at large.

“Immigrants have a behavior of extreme violence. The first to suffer from this are the women, but children are also beaten,” explained a young woman of Maghrebi origin, president of a women’s defence association. “Then, it is enough to see how boys behave violently towards girls to understand that there is sometimes an enormous gap between two types of society. As I see it, the worst of the violence is symbolized by the obligation to wear the veil or the arranged marriages for young girls. Violence for some men is a way of life, a pattern of behavior.” This macho and sexist culture represses women in the domestic arena; it fuels the crudest racism against other immigrant communities (in particular blacks and Asians), it reintroduces into France the scourge of antisemitism which educators have been trying for more than fifty years to contain.

If the new antisemitism which is now running riot is mainly of Maghrebi-Arab origin, it has at the same time liberated the

antisemitic vocabulary of the extreme right which has suddenly become emboldened by this flare-up of aggression.<sup>45</sup> While antisemitism had been following a downward trend in French society (except among Maghrebis), we are now paradoxically witnessing a removal of the taboo inherited from the Holocaust. To the question: “Do the Jews have too much power in France?,” in 1990, 20% of those polled replied in the affirmative. The same reply was given by 34% in 2000. The percentage of “don’t know” is in free fall, and this is the crux of the matter: we are indeed witnessing a breaking of the antisemitic taboo. The media’s demonization of Israel, and antisemitism of Maghrebi origin are in no small measure responsible for this.

It is doubtless also true that the longstanding basis of French antisemitism has been underestimated. The country which celebrated Louis-Ferdinand Céline, the author of *Bagatelles pour un massacre* in 1937, did not suddenly become philosemitic in 1945, merely silent, if that, in accordance with seasons and circumstances, the peaks and troughs of domestic and international current affairs, the high and ebb tides of the fringes of the extreme right. Yet this would be to ignore the ancient and profound prejudice, ordinary contempt, fear, and sometimes hatred which have for so many years been the everyday fare of family conversations about “the Jews”—not really a rabid hatred, only a feeling of rejection (“They are not really like us”) and mistrust, suspicion in the face of this strange anomaly: “Eight years old and already Jewish,” declared a Breton peasant who had been asked to hide a small Jewish boy during the war.

It was on this fertile soil between 1994 and 1998 that Frenchmen were tried for the first time for crimes against humanity.<sup>46</sup> It was also on this fertile soil that victim compensation policies were finalized, and the Foundation for Remembrance of the Holocaust (FMS) was created with the funds left unclaimed by

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<sup>45</sup> This Arab antisemitism imported into France cannot be isolated from the antisemitism which is given free rein in the entire Arab-Muslim world. The American journalist Daniel Pearl, head of the *Wall Street Journal's* Asian bureau, was assassinated in Pakistan at the beginning of February 2002 because he was a Jew. On the videotape recorded by his captors, a pistol aimed at his head, he declares: “My father’s Jewish, my mother’s Jewish, I’m Jewish.” (Cf. “Negationism and anti-Semitism in the Arab-Muslim world: the trend,” *Review of history of the Holocaust*, no. 180 (Jan.–June 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Paul Touvier in 1994 and Maurice Papon in 1997–1998.

deported French Jews, which is now one of the richest foundations in France. How are the recurring fantasies of “Jewish money,” “Jewish power,” and even the “Holocaust business” kept alive? As soon as the trials had taken place, as soon as the head of state officially acknowledged in July 1995 that France bore some responsibility for the Holocaust, as soon as the victims or their descendants had received financial compensation, many—except for them—concluded that a new era had begun. This was, according to Michel Zaoui, one of the lawyers who was a plaintiff there, the most striking perverse effect of these trials. There had been “enough talk of the Jews.” “Wrongs had been righted.” In other words, the Jews should become more discreet. They should lie low.

This barely concealed attitude of irritation was aggravated by the acts of violence committed by antisemites of Maghrebi origin. In the provinces, many believed that these were “inter-community quarrels,” as though the Jews were strangers in France or newly-naturalized citizens, or as though, “they deserved it for what they were doing in Palestine.” We had come full circle. The antisemitic violence of the Maghreb had unleashed a current of anti-Jewish hatred, the existence of which had no longer been suspected and which had developed secretly in French society over the years. Legal decisions, often surprisingly lenient with regard to French antisemites, such as the success of the antisemitic entertainer Dieudonné who is packing theatres in Paris with his declarations, to anyone who wants to listen, that he “wipes his arse with Jews” [*sic*], are but a sign of this leprous spirit which is making the Jews of France strangers in their own country.

### **The Return to History**

Antisemitism of Maghrebi origin resonates primarily as the rebellion of people who do not belong, torn between their original world which they have lost and their new world which offers a chilly welcome. It sounds like the strangled cry of those whose world is breaking up before their very eyes, and who find in the anti-Jewish crystallization of their torment a response to the impenetrability of the times. One thousand bonds link that antisemitism to that of Edouard Drumont, author of *La France Juive* (1886) and *Le Fin d'un monde* (1889). It would, however, be

impossible to content oneself with this assessment even if one must remember the resentment that these anomies of society focus on the Jews and the “rich” in an eradicating hatred which bears a strange resemblance to that which ran right through the medieval apocalyptic currents in the quest for a golden age of peace.

The decline in the status of the father, a man often worn out by life in the “Glorious Thirty”—the years of full employment—doubtless fuelled the revolt of the sons. Added to this was the heritage of the colonial memory transmitted from generation to generation, and the memory of an often violent de-colonization. This memory would certainly have dimmed with time had most of them been successful. They were not.

Academic failure, in particular, often on a large scale, generated a social and mental suffering (one needs to imagine what the lack of a diploma signifies when the diploma is the first line of defence against unemployment) by means of a permanent erosion of self-image. These casualties of the decline of the schools feel as though they have never been acknowledged by the institution. This is all the more true since equality in secondary school has remained a pious illusion.<sup>47</sup>

This is the climate in which the moralizers have focused their attention on the extreme right which remains dangerous, but for reasons which are not necessarily suspected. The denial of reality into which the French media have retreated does not come close to being a “conspiracy,” it is merely akin to the mechanisms of conventional thinking. The difficulty in naming things, the impossibility of identifying the aggressors, the failures of integration, the danger of the Islamic upsurge, the eventual progressive change of the French nation affected by a powerful migratory flow, have paralyzed language and thought. During the past two decades, we have witnessed the establishment of machinery resembling that of the totalitarian world, where the lie is truth when the truth is concealed. So we had to wait two years

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<sup>47</sup> A survey conducted by the teacher Georges Felouzis of *all* the high schools of the Bordeaux local education authority (144,000 students) and based on student *first names*, demonstrated that 10% of these high schools contained 40% of students with first names assumed to originate from the Maghreb, black Africa, and Turkey. Conversely, one quarter of the high schools surveyed contained fewer than 1% of youngsters whose first name is associated with these geographical areas (cf. *Le Monde*, 9 Sept. 2003).

before recognizing antisemitic aggression for what it was—*antisemitism*—and not the handiwork of “young people with nothing to do.” Furthermore, the heightened insecurity had to wait still longer for an admission that it was not only a “feeling,” nor, *a fortiori*, a fantasy of the working classes.

In the face of harsh and violent facts, French public opinion has for a long time denied this refusal to see. At the end of 2002, a sociologist wrote that this antisemitic violence was a “questionable reality.” There was even incredulity regarding the origin of the aggressors as reflected in the expression “young people in difficulty”—as though every young unemployed person had to attack a rabbi to demonstrate his rebellion. In 2002, 77 people were arrested for anti-Jewish violence: 55 of them (approximately 75%) were of Maghrebi origin. Between 1999 and 2003, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia published three reports about anti-Arab racism, but not one on antisemitism. The report commissioned by the Berlin Research Centre for Antisemitism was even censored in February 2003. In France in 2003, while 72% of racist actions and remarks were aimed at Jews, only 13% of respondents believed that Jews had become the primary targets of racist behavior.

The patterns and perceptions of the 1970s and 1980s persist in people’s minds even though they no longer apply. This is why people are convinced of the existence of a majority of anti-Maghrebi acts even though their numbers have fallen: 36 in 1990, 12 in 2001. These are the facts about which the intellectuals and the media, with some few exceptions, have remained silent for more than two years, while proclaiming the refrain that a “Semite” cannot be “anti-Semitic.”<sup>48</sup> *Le Monde*, France’s chief dispenser of intellectual legitimacy, took three years to understand the new reality. It was only in the spring of 2004 that it devoted all its space to the antisemitic atmosphere which has corrupted the country, after a 17-year-old Jewish student was stabbed on his way home from school on June 4, 2004. In the summer of 2002, the “leading daily newspaper” led a campaign against an extremist Jewish website, which has since closed. Yet it could not find one word to

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<sup>48</sup> As admitted by Edwy Plenel, news editor of *Le Monde*, in the newspaper’s supplement, *Monde 2*, of 20 June 2004, almost four years after this violence began: “French Jews are alarmed and we did not assess the situation correctly.”

say about the multitude of Islamist and Arab sites which, backed up by video, call *every day* for hatred of Jews, even for their death.

A number of teachers have adopted this “profile of appeasement” described above which consists of hushing up incidents, avoiding “problem classes,” and above all, the catchword of submission, no “provocation.” A number of intellectuals have suddenly had their thought patterns disrupted. Antisemitic violence, they believed for a long time, did *not happen* because it *could not happen*, because it *should not have happened*. When reality contradicts ideology, when facts clash with beliefs, the reality is wrong and ideology triumphs.

Focusing on Jews accused of ghetto sectarianism because they are sentenced to defend themselves makes it possible to conceal the most alarming part of the French future, the disinheritance of the ghetto-housing estates and the Islamic-Arab upsurge. Training one’s eyes on the kippa or the cross placed on (or hidden under) a sweater allows one to sidestep the single true “sectarian question,” that of an Islamic veil which is otherwise more obvious and discriminatory, and, *finally*, more political than the abovementioned religious symbols. Focusing on a few kippas noticed in public school is not so much an affair of antisemitism as it is an admission of a fear of affirming one’s values, and consequently engaging in combat as if the French nation, morally disarmed, had no more energy to defend itself.

The antisemitic trend points to a multi-faceted crisis endured by France—a crisis which highlights the totalitarian temptation of which part of the French left is finding it difficult to rid itself, which every day confirms the validity of George Orwell’s words, whereby to be anti-fascist, the left is not necessarily anti-totalitarian. People know how this part of the French left used the screen of “progressivism” to endorse almost all the crimes of the last century. It is in the name of this same “progressivism,” since it represents the “masses,” that it now gives its blessing to a Palestinophilia of which at least one faction is genocidal (Article 2 of the Hamas Charter stipulates that “every Jew is a target and must be killed”). And it is because it would be the voice of the “new pariahs of humanity” that in France, this anti-liberal left indirectly supports certain Islamist views.

Universalist anti-racism has made cultural interbreeding the absolute antidote to the return of barbarism. It has become the

unifier of lost illusions. Yet this anti-racism is separate from the struggle against antisemitism, since the Jew-Zionist-Israeli (these three figures which are still separate in the West, are all bracketed together in the Arab world under the term *Yahud* [Jew]) no longer corresponds to the image of the grief-stricken victim traditionally expected of the Jew. This is why the memorial cult of the Holocaust, in particular in the teaching environment, is often promoted by those who at the same time demonize Zionism and the state of Israel.

“One day, in my football club,” recounted a young Jew educated at the Condorcet school in Paris, “in the showers, they noticed that I am circumcised and the guys asked whether I am Jewish or Muslim. I saw no reason to lie. Then one guy came along and said: “Me, I don’t like Jews, I don’t want you in the team any more.”<sup>49</sup> This type of incident, which is now commonplace, still remains traumatic for *each* victim. It highlights that *segment* of Maghrebi young people who object to marriage with a Jew, and who adhere to the “theory” of the Jewish conspiracy guiding the planet’s affairs via “New York and Tel-Aviv.” Together with the extreme right, these youngsters believe that the “Jews in France have too much influence,” etc. These facts are known to all those who refuse to allow themselves to be tricked by the colonization-decolonization diptych, as though all the tendencies of a *segment* of this immigration (most of them are, however, French citizens born in France but who, strangely, continue to be described as “immigrants” or “children of immigrants”) consist of balancing the accounts of France’s colonial history in the Maghreb.

To understand the nature of the antisemitic wave which is now sweeping through France is to look anew at this previously unpublished fact in the history of immigration: a vast community of foreign origin remains in an almost permanent relationship with a world whose vocabulary is often at the opposite end of that which is customary in the West. The parabola is the most visible sign of this slowing down of integration even if it is obviously not the most meaningful. Maghrebi-Arab immigration is not an isolate, neither geographical nor historical. Its main links are with Algeria with which it has permanent relations and where many people now

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<sup>49</sup> *Libération*, 17 Nov. 2003.

spend their holidays. This is the same Algeria, which in the name of rejection of the state of Israel, transformed antisemitism, already widespread in the local Arab-Berber culture, into a veritable national passion. In August 1990, while the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was standing in front of the gates of power, a *Le Monde* journalist reported a meeting held in Constantine during which the crowd began to yell, “their fists clenched up to the sky: ‘Down with the Jews! Down with the Jews!’” This is the same Algeria which has no qualms about reprinting the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the Algeria where in 2000, the Jewish singer Enrico Macias, born in Constantine, had to give up his planned trip to the land of his birth because of death threats. Beyond Algeria, the whole of the Maghreb which is connected to the Near East via internet and satellite television is affected—television which every day spews out violent antisemitism in which the “Jewish conspiracy” is posited as the explanation of all the enigmas of our time. In particular, the stagnation of the Arab world facing the Israelis, citizens of such a ridiculously small country, with such a small population, but which for 56 years has clung to existence in the face of a viscerally hostile Arab world.<sup>50</sup> After the Madrid attacks of March 11, 2004, a high-school student from a Paris suburb wrote in his exercise book “May the name of Bin Laden be blessed.”

This culture of hatred cannot be disconnected from the atypical migration situation which is that of the Maghrebi population in France. The history of immigration demonstrates that it does not often happen that a population installs itself in the country of its former colonizer while continuing to cultivate a fascination born of hatred and resentment. This attitude constitutes a brake on integration and, *a fortiori*, on any attempt at assimilation, which henceforth can only be perceived as a betrayal of the country of origin. Admittedly, any integration-assimilation is always experienced as a betrayal for the migrant, but in contrast to the histories of other migrants, frustration with and rejection of the host country often remain the predominant sentiments, as though a long revenge were necessary. This is why the blockage is still obvious and it prevents us from confusing this immigration with

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<sup>50</sup> The entire Jewish population of Israel represents barely one third of the inhabitants of greater Cairo.

previous or current ones (from China for example). For many men from the Maghreb, the French world is synonymous with the end of *their* world, in particular in matters relating to the status of women, a major cause of tension. It is this masculine and sexist world which some of these men do not intend to lose when they arrive in France, and it is at this world of the Enlightened West that many jib. Losing their bearings, nursing bitterness and disappointment, and also connected to the anti-Jewish tradition of the Maghreb, they find in the figure of the Jew an ideal foil for their phobias and violence. This antisemitism of resentment is mixed with the buried memory of *dhimmitude*, this ideal world where “the Jew” knew “his place.” It contributes to the “Jewish obsession” which preys on the minds of many of Maghrebi origin in France. On this level, *stricto sensu*, it is at one with the plebeian antisemitic crystallization at the end of the 19th century (cf. the Anti-Semitic League in France, the “butchers of La Villette,” and the figures of Jules Guérin in Paris and Max Régis in Algiers).

Whether one rejoices or whether one deplores it, the French identity is being transformed.<sup>51</sup> By means of satellite and cable, and more tenuously by capillarization of discourse, this change is also accompanied by Islamic propaganda which is clandestinely working on the minds of many inhabitants of France’s poor immigrant areas. Even if this discourse remains limited to part of the immigration environments, it is nevertheless dangerous by virtue of its anti-Western and anti-Jewish violence. Today, for example, it is sometimes difficult for a non-Muslim to mention the Quran or Mohammed in a history class. Just as it is sometimes difficult in some schools for a non-Muslim to teach Arabic, as in a Lyons school where a teacher of Arabic (non-Muslim) was challenged by his students about his right to teach “the language of the Quran.”

Yet neither the social impasse caused by a partial integration, nor the repercussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can completely account for this liberation of antisemitic discourse. In the France of today, everything happens as though the colonial situation had

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<sup>51</sup> “The presence of millions of French citizens or residents of ‘immigrant origin’ is transforming the collective psychology of society and we must tackle this issue head-on. The Israeli-Arab conflict resonates very strongly right into in the French housing estates and we must realize this.” wrote Tariq Ramadan in *Le Monde*, 29 Oct. 2003.

not been outmoded, first, for the aggressors in the eyes of whom the Jews are an obsessional figure which polarizes their resentment; and second, for the “French born and bred” who used to place “communities” back to back as they once did, “there.” Everything happens as though the Crémieux Decree of 1870—a trauma for the Muslim population of Algeria—had not been overcome; as though the place of the Jews in French society of today—their high socio-cultural level, and their excellent integration into the nation—were reopening the ancient wound of the colonial Maghreb.

For in the three former French territories of north Africa, it turns out that the Muslim anti-Jewish resentment never ceased—not during the 1930s, nor during the war years, nor later. The old Jewish optimism wanted to conceal this reality for a long time. Just like the tree which hides the forest, it highlighted the exemplary attitude of the Sultan (the future Mohammed V) towards the Jews of his kingdom. It deluded itself with the illusory refrain about the Judeo-Arab Golden Age. It fuelled myths and fed on them to the point where it no longer understood the actual barrage of aggression.

Yet since people have become aware of this past, the main point is quite clear. The aggressors of today receive their spiritual nourishment from that fertile soil, even though, as is probable, they were ignorant of this history. On the other hand, what they did know, because in certain respects it is akin to their ethos, via the traditional education which they received, is the Judeophobic sentiment, and the latent tendency to use violence against the *dhimmi* Jews precisely when they had psychologically broken the “pact of *dhimmitude*.” Even the Sultan of Morocco, so highly placed in the collective memory of the kingdom’s Jews, was surrounded by advisers not well disposed towards them.<sup>52</sup> These realities, combined with others, more topical and local, allow us to better

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<sup>52</sup> One of them was the Grand Vizier Al-Muqri. In 1940, he made the following remark to Paul Baudouin, Foreign Minister of the Vichy regime: “Before the Protectorate, it took the Jews about twenty years to make a large fortune; they enjoyed it for ten years and then there was a small revolution which caused them to lose their fortune. The Jews started again and over thirty years rebuilt their wealth only to have their excessive assets confiscated. Now that the Protectorate exists, we fear that this thirty-year rhythm has been broken. The Protectorate has lasted for twenty-eight years. That means that we have two years in which to confiscate the fortune of the Jews in accordance with the secular rule which seems very wise to me.” (quoted in *ibid.*, 373).

locate the source of the antisemitic violence by repositioning it into the frame of the longstanding Judeo-Arab relations in the Maghreb.<sup>53</sup>

So it was, for the first time since the Vichy regime, that at the end of 2003, the French Republic witnessed in the Paris District Court, a request for a judge to recuse himself on denominational grounds. The defendant, a Tunisian citizen tried and sentenced in absentia in October 2003, had been sought in connection with a financial matter. On the day of the hearing he filed a petition for the officiating magistrate to recuse herself in which he wrote:

Whereas one of the parties, Mr. A. (he himself is of Arab origin and a Muslim), and the other party, the company Y., whose interests are closely linked with those of its founder, Mr. Z., who is Jewish; on the other hand, in light of the current geopolitical context (Israel-Palestine conflict), it is very difficult to believe that the judge Ms. X (who is Jewish) will handle this matter impartially.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The same Mohammed Al-Muqri, on January 4, 1941, issued the following circular to the “governors of the towns and ports” of Morocco: “various sources have drawn the attention of his Sharifian Majesty to the fact that many Muslim women work as servants in Jewish homes.

This situation, of which you must be aware, erodes the respect due to Muslim women and undermines their dignity. In addition, it creates a reputation which Our Religion condemns and which is liable to incite the Jews to despise Muslims and forget their *dhimmi* status [*sic*], while under no circumstances should they, on pain of exposing themselves to the dangers which they dread, remove themselves from their traditional life and the limits within which it had always been lived.” (CDJC [Jewish Contemporary Documentation Centre] Archives, Paris).

<sup>54</sup> *Le Monde*, 20 Nov. 2003. Still more interesting is the fact that this petition was studied by the judicial authorities, but in the end was not accepted. The magistrates’ trade union lodged a complaint as follows: “nothing justifies an appeal court ruling based on such reasons. The law allowed the petition not to be studied. These matters cannot be handled administratively.”

## CONCLUSION

Antisemitism is a good indicator of civic decline. Moreover, France is often perceived as an “antisemitic country” in the West, particularly in the United States. This is an antisemitism which arrives at the right time to remove the taboo that existed after the Holocaust, to liberate the antisemitic speech of an old country in which there has been a tendency in the past twenty years to underestimate the potential for rejection of Jews.<sup>55</sup> Is it a question of asserting, as men of goodwill invariably do, that with the Jews, it is “the whole of democracy which is under threat?” Yet this is what was already being said in the 1930s with the effectiveness with which we are familiar: “It is not only the Jewish people who are in danger. If the Jews die, Christians, democrats and liberals are condemned to suffer the same fate: liberty is indivisible.”<sup>56</sup>

To combat the flood of antisemitic words and acts, one could have expected an outburst of national indignation, a massive demonstration of the type which followed the desecration of the Jewish cemetery in Carpentras in May 1990. This outburst never came. The Jews of France found themselves standing alone. People even pondered at length the reality of antisemitic violence. Yet the facts had been established long ago, since they led the French deputies to vote unanimously on December 10, 2002, for a law “punishing offences of racist, antisemitism and xenophobic nature” (official text of the proposed law). Nevertheless, at the

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<sup>55</sup> The affair of the textbook published by Nathan and prepared by the National Center of Pedagogical Documentation (CNDP) of Franche-Comté in 2003 (*Enseigner le fait religieux. Un défi pour la laïcité*) [Teaching religious facts. A challenge for secularity] is enlightening. The “Judaism” chapter states that since “the Jews are no longer guardians of the biblical text, persecutions have been renewed (p. 207). About the development of modern antisemitism and its causes, the author explains that it comes, inter alia, “from the part played by certain Jewish families in the economy, in business, and in finance, a feeling of hostility towards them has developed among the working classes. Then the Jewishness of Marx...attracts to the Jewish “people” the hatred of the ruling classes. This was how antisemitism was born.” (p. 207). So, wherever we look in the two above-mentioned cases, the Jews are responsible for their misfortune.

As for the Holocaust, in certain Jews it has caused a “quasi-paranoid” tendency” and in certain Christians “almost pathological feelings of guilt.” The Jews of north Africa who “did not experience the Holocaust” [*sic*], are developing “a dangerous form of theologization” about it (p. 209).

<sup>56</sup> The delegate Perlzweig at the World Jewish Congress, in *April 1939*.

same time, some people made it known that the Jewish community *believed* itself to be a victim of insecurity.

After the vote on April 21, 2002 in which the candidate from the extreme right took second place in the presidential election, a tidal wave against the danger represented by the National Front swept through the country. The idealized France took pride of place against what would soon be called the “grassroots France,” which remained indifferent. Some isolated voices had, however, attempted to make themselves heard against the current of preconceived ideas fixated on the rear-view mirror of “fascism-Nazism” unable to identify the new faces of totalitarianism. “In France, we do not say certain things,” declared the Lyons priest Christian Delorme, “sometimes for laudable reasons. This also applies to the high juvenile delinquency rate of children born to immigrant parents, which has long been denied, in order to avoid stigmatization. We expected that the reality of the poor immigrant areas, of the police stations, the courts, the prisons would require evidence of this overrepresentation to acknowledge it publicly. And yet, the politicians did not know how to talk about it.”<sup>57</sup> “The nature of the violence has evolved,” commented Malek Boutih, former president of SOS Racism, and some immigrant areas are undergoing ghettoization, even sectarianism. Over the years, we have been polarized on the extreme right, at the risk of forgetting what has happened under our nose. Today, we must talk about things, even when they are embarrassing. This high juvenile delinquency rate of children born to immigrant parents is visible to society and it is in our interest to break the taboo.”<sup>58</sup>

“The replies belong to us, but we do not choose the questions. We have an interest in knowing,” commented Marcel Gauchet recently.<sup>59</sup> Against an appeasement of the spirit which will eventually provoke general discord in the nation, it is the intellectuals, the leaders of the Maghrebi community, in one word, the scholars, who should denounce this tendency which is paving the way to decline, and it is the rest of the nation which should support these courageous militants by objecting to the silence maintained by the “professional Turks” (contributors to the Islamization of France) who are always ready to shout

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<sup>57</sup> *L'É Monde*, 4 Dec. 2001.

<sup>58</sup> *L'É Monde*, 31 Mar. 2002.

<sup>59</sup> *The historical condition* (Stock, 2003), 60.

“Islamophobia.” Having been a presence in the Arab world for one thousand years, the Jewish civilization was uprooted in under forty years. The patterns which led to this enormous exodus should not be permitted to reproduce themselves in France.

We know, however, the limits of attempting to reason, even its futility when it is about this endless passion which is antisemitism, this crystallization of the most archaic fears and consequently those which are the most resistant to understanding: “It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of a thing he was never reasoned into” wrote Jonathan Swift. It is in the “poor immigrant areas” and “housing estates” that the future of this country will be decided in the next decade. In a Europe constitutionally based since 1945 on the rejection of Nazism, and more recently on the study of the crime that was the Holocaust, and moreover, in a founding nation of the European Union, to allow the development of a discourse of hatred which removes all the barriers to rejection is to break the democratic pact. By denying the reality, by leaving the “Jewish community” to face the ordeal alone, many intellectuals have encouraged Jewish sectarianism only to revile it later. To bring the Jews of France, those who are neither foreigners, nor recent immigrants, to anti-republicanism would be for the Republic to ratify its own disintegration in this stench of cowardice, which has already polluted France’s recent history of those who prefer servitude to confrontation.