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Where Do the Hijab and the Kippah Belong? On Being Publicly Jewish or Muslim in Post-*Hebdo* France

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Abstract To date, scholars have rarely talked about contemporary antisemitism and Islamophobia in France as part of a single story. When they have, it has typically been as part of a framework for analyzing racism that is essentially competitive: some depict Islamophobia as less a real problem than a frequent excuse to ignore antisemitism; others minimize antisemitism as an unfortunate but marginal phenomenon by comparison with the pervasive nature of anti-Muslim racism in French society. This article argues that the two are inseparable, and it focuses on a hitherto overlooked set of connections: in the era since the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher in January 2015, at key flash points that question Muslim belonging in France, the position of Jews has repeatedly been invoked in ambiguous, contradictory ways. Participants in these public debates have sometimes forcefully maintained that Jews are unlike Muslims, since they have long been fully integrated French citizens. At other moments, these discussions have raised the specter of Jewish ethnic and religious difference. By emphasizing Jewish particularity, such debates evoke, perforce, the past twenty-five years of controversies about the allegedly problematic attire, food, and beliefs of France's Muslims. The article focuses on several key moments, from the speech of Prime Minister Manuel Valls before the French parliament in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher attacks, to the kippah and burkini affairs of 2016, to the provocative comments of candidates in the 2017 presidential elections concerning Muslim and Jewish religious and ethnic markers of difference.

Keywords Kippah · Burkini · Hijab · France · *Charlie Hebdo* · Jews and Muslims

For all the ink that has been spilled on the matters of antisemitism and Islamophobia in contemporary France, commentators rarely treat the two in tandem. To the extent that some observers connect antisemitism and Islamophobia, they tend to do so along one of two sharply contrasting paths. Some depict Muslims as France's—and Europe's—"new Jews," that is, as having assumed Jews' former structural position within European racism.¹ In this view, today's Islamophobia is the successor to the antisemitism of prior eras.

¹For France, arguments in this vein can already be seen in Esther Benbassa, *La république face à ses minorités: Les juifs hier, les musulmans aujourd'hui* (Paris, 2004); Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ, 2010). For Europe broadly, see esp. Matti Bunzl, ed., *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds Old and New in Europe* (Chicago, 2007); Enzo Traverso, *The End of Jewish Modernity* (London, 2015).

A contrasting approach emphasizes the rise in anti-Jewish violence in twenty-first-century France and the fact that most known perpetrators are Muslims.² Those with the latter perspective often contend that the specter of Islamophobia plays a debilitating role, leading to a kind of political correctness that prevents the state from speaking truthfully about the threat of antisemitism and responding to it appropriately.³

In reality, French Jewry's position today is neither so secure as suggested in the first outlook, nor so singularly imperiled as the second implies. Rather, events since the *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher attacks have repeatedly cast into sharp relief the ambivalent place of Jews in contemporary France—and how ideas about Muslim and Jewish difference are intertwined. National conversations focused on Muslim difference have had a rather paradoxical impact on Jews. At first blush, when Jews are invoked in conversations about Muslims, it is more often as a model than as a problem. Rhetoric around Muslims has typically treated their current status in France in terms akin to the discourse of “regeneration” around Jews in the era of emancipation: that is, Muslims can gain full acceptance in France if they will enter the modern, secular world and fully accept what it means to live as a French citizen under French sovereign law. By contrast, few dispute that Jews largely have succeeded in fulfilling the terms of the French social contract and integrating within the larger French body politic.

Nonetheless, these conversations have a more ambiguous side for Jews as well. First, the presence of Jews in conversations about Muslims—France's current, undisputed ethnic and religious Other—constantly reiterates that Jews remain different too. In the process, even the most ardent defenders of Jews' place in the Republic reveal that the ideal of French universalism paradoxically requires that Jews be both demonstrably different and integrated. Second, both policy changes and rhetorical turns have sometimes highlighted Jewish difference as itself a competing or analogous problem alongside that of Muslims. Typically, Jews' inclusion is thrown into question based upon their alleged resort to *communautarisme* (their communal affiliation, which is theoretically denied by the social contract of French citizenship), or their presumed loyalty to the State of Israel, or their persistent practice of outmoded, embodied religious rituals.

Thus it will not do simply to treat Muslims in France as the “new Jews” or to address antisemitism in isolation. Both approaches risk ignoring three

²On antisemitic incidents and the known perpetrators, the most thorough information is found in the annual reports of the Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme.

³For a concise, representative articulation of this view by one of its leading adherents, see Shmuel Trigano, “A Journey through French Anti-Semitism,” *Jewish Review of Books* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 5–7, <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/1534/a-journey-through-french-anti-semitism/>.

essential realities: ongoing and persistent attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions, frequently perpetrated by Muslims; the enduring discussion of Jewish communal identity as a problem of difference, even as Jews are simultaneously upheld as a model for integration; and the way public conversations repeatedly treat Muslim and Jewish difference as interlocked.⁴

A Tale of Two Speeches

On January 13, 2015, days after the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher, Prime Minister Manuel Valls addressed the French parliament. In a widely praised speech, Valls devoted considerable time to the positions of France's Jews and Muslims. In the first instance, he detailed the wave of antisemitism of recent years, calling it "intolerable" and insisting that Jews had to be made safer in France. Further, he argued, "we know from history" that antisemitism is "a symptom of the crisis of democracy, of a crisis of the Republic." Insisting that an attack on Jews was an attack on both France itself and the "universal conscience," Valls reiterated a sentiment that he had expressed previously: "without the Jews of France, France would no longer be France."⁵

With regard to Muslims, the prime minister painted a picture that was at once parallel and more complex. While he denounced Islamic radicalism and said that France needed to show unyielding strength in the face of attacks carried out in the name of Islam, he insisted that France was not at war with Islam itself. Indeed, he asserted the fundamental importance of protecting Muslim fellow citizens and houses of worship, and he spoke poignantly not only of anti-Muslim attacks in recent days but also of the fear and shame expressed to him by Muslim friends. "Islam," he noted, "is now the second religion of France and has its rightful place in France."⁶ He claimed that France needed to demonstrate this fact not only to its own people but also to the world.

Underneath Valls's words about France's Jews and Muslims, one could detect a call for tolerance of all religions in the public space, even intimations of a "right to difference" like that championed most famously by the

⁴For an incisive, extended critique of the idea that Europe's Muslims are its "new Jews," see Chad Goldberg, conclusion of *Modernity and the Jews in European Social Thought* (Chicago, 2017).

⁵"Allocution de Manuel Valls, premier ministre: Séance spéciale d'hommage aux victimes des attentats," Assemblée nationale, January 13, 2015, Service Communication, Hôtel Matignon, 7–8. For a video recording of Valls's speech, see "Attentats en France: Retrouvez en intégralité le discours de Manuel Valls," France 24, January 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcX1iQ9TLPI>.

⁶"Allocution de Manuel Valls," 9.

antiracism movement of the 1980s. Both Jews and Muslims, Valls seemed to imply, while having distinctive positions and histories in France, faced peculiar challenges and were worthy of protection and respect. The intertwining of Jewish and Muslim destinies—with one another and with that of the Republic—became most explicit when Valls declared passionately near the end of his speech: “I don’t want it to be the case any longer that there are Jews in our country who are afraid or Muslims who are ashamed! Because the Republic is fraternal, it is generous, it is there to welcome everyone!”⁷

Here Valls had implicitly invoked a vision of France wherein integration and, by extension, *laïcité* (secularism) could follow the path of accommodation that has historically constituted the more pragmatic strand of French republican secularism.⁸ And yet within the same speech there soon emerged a discourse of disparity: in the end, being Jewish and Muslim in public did not mean the same thing. In the case of Jews, speaking of one of the victims of the attack at Hyper Cacher, he called it unacceptable that a man who had been sent by his father from Tunisia to France so that he could be safe as a Jew would be murdered while he was out “buying bread for Shabbat.” More than once, Valls bitterly denounced the fact that Jews were targeted simply for being Jews. In the case of Muslims, by contrast, he couched their acceptance in more conditional terms: “The Republic, *laïcité*, the equality of women, are compatible with all religions on our national soil *that accept the principles and the values of the Republic*.”⁹ The line suggested that whereas a Jew should be able to be a Jew in public, this was less certain for a Muslim.

Suddenly, it seemed, Valls was invoking the language of the more militant, uncompromising strand of *laïcité* that has sought to claim normativity since the early twenty-first century.¹⁰ Valls declared that France had been attacked precisely because of measures like its controversial 2004 law banning all

⁷“Allocution de Manuel Valls,” 9.

⁸Such a pragmatic version of the Republic and *laïcité* has deep roots in France: it is embodied in the words of Emile Combes—one of the most anticlerical prime ministers of the Third Republic—who called the Qur’an an exemplary work of literature and insisted that secular schoolteachers show the book “the most profound respect.” More recently, since the early twenty-first century, the French state has institutionalized a new effort to recognize and combat various forms of discrimination, including against ethnic minorities. Jean Bauberot, *L’Intégrisme républicain contre la laïcité* (Paris, 2006), chaps. 3, 5. On the two strands of the Republic, see Veronique Dimier, “French Secularism in Debate: Old Wine in New Bottles,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 92–110. Regarding an important “countertradition” within French universalism that has not always insisted on flattening all (particularly Jewish) difference, see Maurice Samuels, *The Right to Difference: French Universalism and the Jews* (Chicago, 2016).

⁹“Allocution de Manuel Valls,” 9 (my emphasis).

¹⁰Dimier refers to this version as “assimilationist and centralizing.” See Dimier, “French Secularism in Debate,” 94.

“ostentatious” religious signs in public schools (in response specifically to the hijab) and its 2010 ban on the so-called burka in public spaces. At the heart of Valls’s speech, then, lay a deep tension between two distinct models of *laïcité*, and by extension, of the Republic.¹¹

Within this equivocation on the terms of *laïcité* lay another, equally important for our purposes. On the one hand, Valls’s statements about Jews’ importance to France’s essence and his more cautious approach to Muslim inclusion suggested that unlike Muslims, Jews had a special place in the fabric of the Republic *qua* Jews. On the other hand, at arguably the climactic moment of the speech, Valls made explicit an analogy between the position, vulnerability, and difference of Jews and of Muslims. Jewish difference was, that is, at once a possible model and a potential problem.

I have lingered over Valls’s much-acclaimed speech because for the next two years, its contradictory impulses would prove emblematic across several moments of crisis and controversy. Thus opened a critical new phase in an old story. Repeatedly, since the nineteenth century, the images and fates of Jews and Muslims in France and its empire have been deeply entwined. More specifically, French discourses about Muslim difference have served both to highlight and to downplay Jewish difference. This was the case, for instance, in debates over Jewish emancipation in Algeria during the middle decades of the nineteenth century and in the months surrounding Algerian independence in 1961–62, when Jews from Algeria secured guarantees of French citizenship in direct contradistinction to Algeria’s Muslims, who had to forfeit theirs.¹²

The events of 2015–16 introduced a new conversation specifically about *laïcité*, in which Jews have at once served as the foil and the shadow for fears about Muslims. When Valls said France would not be France without its Jews, he highlighted the necessity of both Jewish difference and Jewish integration to the French Republic’s self-conception. At the same time, his statement about the compatibility of the Republic with all religions that accept its principles echoed the calls of revolutionaries and nineteenth-century reformists for the “regeneration” of Jews in exchange for citizenship and full

¹¹Maurice Samuels has also offered a careful analysis of these contradictions within Valls’s speech, though with somewhat different emphases and conclusions. Samuels, *Right to Difference*, conclusion.

¹²For entwined discourses and policies regarding Jews and Muslims in the nineteenth century, see Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2010). For the twentieth century, see Maud S. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict* (Princeton, NJ, 2014); Ethan B. Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France* (Cambridge, MA, 2015). On the moment of 1961–62 specifically, see also Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY, 2006), chap. 6.

equality.¹³ The unspoken opposition here between Muslim aspiration and Jewish achievement was that Jews, having regenerated themselves as completely French, were now acceptable, but only in that fully regenerated condition. Since Valls's speech, Jews' ambivalent position has been highlighted over and over in conversations ostensibly about Muslims. Various French state officials and intellectuals have repeatedly invoked, even criticized, Jewish difference in connection with or analogy to that of Muslims; others, meanwhile, have defended a Jewish right to public difference or highlighted Jewish assimilation.

Whose *Laïcité*?

In the months following the attacks at *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher, the divergence between Jews' and Muslims' positions in the French public sphere appeared to become more clear cut: Jewish difference was subsumed into an overall sense of inclusion while Muslims once again appeared suspect. Thousands of French police and soldiers were deployed to guard Jewish sites.¹⁴ Meanwhile, even as they spoke of aggressive efforts to integrate Muslims, French leaders appeared to double down on more militant versions of *laïcité*. For many, the free expression championed by *Charlie Hebdo*, and more specifically the need to defend the newspaper's right to ridicule Islam, became emblematic of *laïcité* (no matter the lack of historicity in such an understanding).¹⁵ Within two weeks of the attacks, the French education ministry announced a plan to invest 250 million euros in "moral and civic education," emphasizing both a renewed focus on *laïcité* and the need for French teachers to stamp out any attempt by students to question the values

¹³See Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley, 2005); Jay Berkovitz, *The Shaping of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Detroit, 1989).

¹⁴"Les 717 écoles et lieux de culte juifs français protégés par 4700 policiers et gendarmes," *Le Point*, January 12, 2015, http://www.lepoint.fr/societe/les-717-ecoles-juives-en-france-protegees-par-4-700-policiers-et-gendarmes-12-01-2015-1895724_23.php; "Deux après l'Hyper Cacher, des commerces juifs entre vigilance et 'vivre avec,'" BFM TV (website), January 4, 2017, <https://www.bfmtv.com/police-justice/deux-apres-l-hyper-cacher-des-commerces-juifs-entre-vigilance-et-vivre-avec-1077755.html>.

¹⁵James D. Le Sueur, "Conflating *Laïcité* with Free Speech: The French are Making a Mistake about *Charlie Hebdo*," *Muslimmatters.org*, February 19, 2015, <https://muslimmatters.org/2015/02/19/conflating-laicite-with-free-speech-the-french-are-making-a-mistake-about-charlie-hebdo/>.

of the Republic.¹⁶ French president François Hollande designated December 9 as a national day of *laïcité* to be celebrated in all public schools.¹⁷

For Jews, the issue of *laïcité* in schools has long been highly complex. Many Jews vocally supported the 2004 ban on “ostentatious religious signs” in French public schools, seeing it as a bulwark against the rise of Islamism. At the same time, because the law banned not only the hijab but also the kippah, it accelerated the mass departure of traditional Jewish students from the French public schools where they had enrolled in large numbers until only a generation before.¹⁸

Before the dust had settled from the attacks of January 2015, it was the school cafeteria that had become a new site for debates over *laïcité*. Once more, in a discussion focused on Muslims, Jews too were implicated.¹⁹ National controversy erupted over efforts to overturn the widespread practice of the so-called substitution menu. Such an option has long been available in thousands of French public schools as an alternative on days when the cafeteria’s main menu contains pork. In March 2015, however, Gilles Platret, mayor of Chalon-sur-Saône in Eastern France, announced that effective September 2015, his town would institute a single menu for all students. Platret cited “the principle of *laïcité*, which is the foundation of our coexistence.”²⁰ Several other municipalities considered following suit. Also invoking *laïcité*, France’s former president (and then presidential aspirant) Nicholas Sarkozy reiterated his own call for an end to the substitution menu. To be sure, such

¹⁶“Laïcité et valeurs républicaines à l’école: Le plan de Vallaud-Belkacem,” France 24 (website), January 22, 2015, <http://www.france24.com/fr/20150122-france-laicite-valeurs-republicaines-ecole-solutions-vallaud-belkacem-attentat-charlie-hebdo>.

¹⁷Aurélié Collas, “Après les attentats, l’école exalte la laïcité,” *Le Monde*, December 9, 2015, https://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2015/12/09/une-journee-de-la-laicite-a-l-ecole-dix-mois-apres-les-polemiques-de-janvier_4827470_4809495.html.

¹⁸Regarding Jewish responses to the “Headscarf Affair” of 2003–4 and its antecedents, see Judith E. Vichniac, “Jewish Identity Politics and the Scarf Affairs in France,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 26, no. 1 (2008): 111–28. On the law’s effect as a secularizing measure that pushed Jewish students out of French public schools, see Gayle Zachmann, “The Happy Jew: Legacies, Crises, and Post-Charlie Hebdo Conscience,” *Contemporary French Civilization* 41, no. 2 (2016): 282. Statistically, the shift has been marked over a longer term: from sixteen thousand students in Jewish schools in the late 1980s, the number had almost doubled to twenty-eight thousand by 2002 and it has continued to grow. Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, DC, 2006), 228.

¹⁹During the 2012 presidential elections, for instance, issues like the substitution menu (see below) and the question of halal in school cafeterias had already been topics of debate.

²⁰“Chalon-sur-Saône: Le maire décide de revenir au menu unique dans les cantines scolaires,” Franceinfo (website), March 16, 2015, <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/bourgogne-franche-comte/saone-et-loire/chalon-sur-saone/chalon-sur-saone-le-maire-decide-de-revenir-au-menu-unique-dans-les-cantines-scolaires-676197.html>.

voices were far from unanimous. Prime Minister Valls sharply opposed such measures, as did some members of Sarkozy's own party.²¹

Nonetheless, the contest over the substitution menu saw state actors seek to curtail the observance of Jewish and Muslim traditions in the name of secularism and neutrality. While the move clearly targeted Muslims, it potentially affected a number of Jewish students as well.²² Moreover, it renewed a long-standing emphasis on the importance of certain kinds of food and drink to the French national character, which has led frequently to questions about Jews' depth of Frenchness. As Pierre Birnbaum has documented, pork in particular has long been widely recognized as "an emblem that unifies ways of doing, of feeling, and of celebrating among all citizens."²³ This was hardly the first time that expositors of the republican tradition had struggled to take seriously the religious laws and traditions of certain groups concerning forbidden foods. The controversy echoed many secularists' long-standing insistence that religious legal codes and bodily rituals are fundamentally at odds with enlightened modernity. According to this supercessionist outlook, becoming a secular and loyal citizen necessarily entails the abandonment of such laws and rituals.²⁴

This view resonates further in contemporary France, not only for Muslims but also for Jews, due to widely circulating writings valorizing St. Paul, the Jew who became the "Apostle to the Gentiles," as a model for contemporary universalism. Prominent French intellectual Alain Badiou has written extensively about the "authentic Jew," of which Paul is the archetype.²⁵ This

²¹Alexandre Boudet, "Sarkozy et les menus sans porc: Sa position ne convainc pas tout le monde à l'UMP," Huffpost (website), March 18, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2015/03/18/sarkozy-menus-sans-porc-position-convainc-pas-tout-le-monde-ump-laicite_n_6894494.html; "Menu sans porc à la cantine: La polémique revient sur la table," *Sud Ouest*, March 18, 2015, <http://www.sudouest.fr/2015/03/18/menu-sans-porc-a-la-cantine-la-polemique-revient-sur-la-table-1863152-710.php>.

²²Admittedly, this would likely be less of an issue for Jews, since far fewer religiously observant Jews than Muslims have continued in recent years to attend French public schools.

²³Pierre Birnbaum, *La République et le cochon* (Paris, 2013), 25; Birnbaum, *Anti-Semitism in France: A Political History from Léon Blum to the Present*, trans. Miriam Kochan (Oxford, 1992), chap. 6.

²⁴This strand of secularism has been dissected in the work of Talal Asad. See esp. Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity* (Palo Alto, CA, 2003). On Muslims in France specifically, the issue of corporeal practices is treated at length in Naomi Davidson, *Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY, 2012). Ironically, as Birnbaum clearly shows in *La République et le cochon*, ideas in France about both the cultural importance of pork and the need to discard outmoded dietary laws owe as much to legacies of the ancien régime and French Catholicism as they do to the French Revolution and republican *laïcité*.

²⁵The specific language here comes from Alain Badiou, *Polemics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London, 2006), 184–85. Here and in my discussions of Badiou below I have relied upon the cita-

Jew is defined as “the one who says in the name of all others that there is no law separating them” and channels himself “to break the divisive law and devote humanity to the universal.”²⁶ Badiou contrasts this so-called authenticity with what he terms the “virtual” Jews and their “S.I.T.” complex, standing for “Shoah,” “Israel,” and “Tradition.”²⁷ Thus, for Badiou, the ideal Jew is one who abandons any laws, rituals, or attachments that have separated him or her from the universal. What Badiou’s outlook shares with that of the opponents of the substitute meal in public school cafeterias is the idea that if Jews want to be embraced by France, they should shed any vestiges of their particularistic religious practices or cultural identity.

In the face of the controversy over the substitute meals, France’s chief rabbi Haïm Korsia spoke up in the name of a different vision of public secularism. He denounced Mayor Platret’s action as “heresy” and sought to reclaim the accommodationist strand of *laïcité*, which he defined as “living together while preserving the freedom of each individual in respect for the other and the law.”²⁸

Citizens versus Terrorists, or Why Kippahs Are Not Like Burkinis

If debates over pork in school cafeterias highlighted common predicaments of Jews and Muslims, the events of November 13, 2015, separated the two groups once more. That night, in a series of coordinated attacks, Islamist terrorists murdered 130 people in Paris and its northern suburb of Saint-Denis. In the wake of these attacks, French Jews spoke of a stronger identification between themselves and the wider French public. One commentator, Olivier Rafowicz, himself a reserve colonel in the Israeli Defense Forces, wrote in the pages of the community newsletter *Actualité Juive*: “Today the Europeans understand that Israel is a kind of [Noah’s] Ark, and that [in Europe] they must in the same manner construct their own [bulwark against] the deluge of hatred and violence that awaits them.”²⁹ Some even noted that the site

tions and analysis of Badiou in Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought* (Chicago, 2010), 261–62.

²⁶ Alain Badiou, *Circonstances*, vol. 3, *Portées du mot “juif”* (Paris, 2005); Badiou, *Polemics*, 49–50.

²⁷ Badiou, *Polemics*, esp. 230.

²⁸ “Suppression des repas de substitution sans porc: Une “hérésie” pour le Grand rabbin de France,” *Le Monde Juif*, March 24, 2015, <https://www.lemondejuif.info/2015/03/suppression-des-repas-de-substitution-sans-porc-une-heresie-pour-le-grand-rabbin-de-france/>.

²⁹ Olivier Rafowicz, “Olivier Rafowicz: La France a été frappée au coeur,” *Actualité Juive*, December 1, 2015, <http://www.actuj.com/2015-12/france/2672-olivier-rafowicz-la-france-a-ete-frappee-au-coeur>.

of the most lethal of the November 13 attacks, the Bataclan nightclub, not only embodied hedonistic Parisian secular culture; in addition, several years earlier it had hosted gala events in support of Israel and thus was regarded by pro-Palestinian activists as a “Zionist space.”³⁰ Such comments strongly linked the challenges faced by France and Israel. Jewishness and Frenchness seemed almost one and the same in their vulnerability to terror.

Yet the so-called kippah affair of January 2016 would show just how tenuous such solidarity could be, and how transnational identifications on the part of many French Jews were as often as not seen as a complicating factor for Jewish adherence to *laïcité*. On January 11, 2016, in Marseille, a Jewish teacher named Benjamin Amsellem, wearing his kippah and carrying a tractate of the Talmud, was attacked with a machete. The perpetrator was a self-radicalized fifteen-year-old Muslim who identified himself as a member of ISIS. While Amsellem survived, following the attacks—the latest in a series of stabbings against Jews—the head of the Jewish community of Marseille advised that all Jews in France should refrain for the time being from wearing the kippah in public.

Immediately, this statement provoked an uproar. Chief rabbi Korsia urged Jews to reject this advice. President Hollande sounded a rather more flexible note than he had just months earlier with respect to expressions of religious (i.e. Muslim) affiliation in schools; now he contended it was “intolerable that Jews should feel pressured to hide themselves because of their religious choices.”³¹ In response to a call to solidarity from Korsia, many fans of the Marseilles soccer team wore head coverings to the team’s next match, declaring that such a gesture was necessary “in order no longer to fear being what you are.”³² Two members of the French National Assembly, one Jewish and the other Catholic, arrived at the halls of parliament sporting kippahs. The Catholic deputy Claude Goasguen articulated a decidedly mixed view of how the kippah compared to Muslim religious attire. Claiming that his gesture was universal, he insisted that “if tomorrow it is a Muslim [who is under attack for religious expression], I will wear a crescent”; yet in emphasizing that

³⁰Véronique Mortaigne and Nathalie Guibert, “Le Bataclan, un haut lieu de la culture ciblé de longue date par les islamistes,” *Le Monde*, November 15, 2015, https://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2015/11/15/le-bataclan-un-haut-lieu-de-la-culture-cible-de-longue-date-par-les-islamistes_4810424_4809495.html.

³¹“Kippa: Hollande juge ‘insupportable’ que des citoyens français doivent ‘se cacher,’” Europe 1 (website), January 13, 2016, <http://www.europe1.fr/politique/kippa-hollande-juge-insupportable-que-des-citoyens-francais-doivent-se-cacher-2649921>.

³²“Videos: Appel à porter la kippa; Les supporters de l’OM solidaires,” *Le Parisien*, January 14, 2016, <http://www.leparisien.fr/societe/appele-a-porter-la-kippa-les-supporters-de-l-om-solidaires-14-01-2016-5450795.php>.

the kippah was an example of quiet, unostentatious religious garb, he drew a specific contrast: “the kippah is not the burka.”³³

As the kippah affair became a topic of national conversation, such comparisons to Islamic sartorial controversies became common. The influential Jewish philosopher and public intellectual Shmuel Trigano interpreted gestures like Goasguen’s as empty, criticizing the government for encouraging Jews to continue to wear their kippahs. Trigano claimed that such calls only sought to retain an air of normalcy in a time of actual crisis, making Jews once more “symbolic hostages of the incapacity of the state to face up to the problem that Islam poses to the Republic.” “If Jews see themselves urged today to wear the kippah,” he asked, “will [French state officials] demand tomorrow that Muslims wear the burka as a sign of identity? And then, will they accuse the Jews of being responsible?”³⁴ For Trigano, Jews were always being treated as symbols for a republican logic that had retreated from a necessary confrontation with the challenge of Islam to the French laic model. The head of Marseille’s Jewish community, in urging Jews to stop wearing the kippah, had simply made a pragmatic, logical suggestion. The absence of the kippah from the street would make evident, said Trigano, a reality that already existed: the “erasure of the Jewish community.”³⁵ Whatever one thinks of his pessimism and sweeping historical claims, Trigano had put his finger on two uncomfortable realities: first, in January 2016, talking about the kippah was often a way of talking about (or avoiding addressing directly) the hijab; and second, Jews increasingly suffered collateral damage from France’s persistent failure to integrate its Muslim population.³⁶

³³Laure Equy, “Des kippas sur la tête à l’Assemblée ‘par solidarité,’” *Libération*, January 13, 2016, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/01/13/des-kippas-sur-la-tete-a-l-assemblee-par-solidarite_1426179.

³⁴Shmuel Trigano, “De quoi la kippah est-elle le nom?,” *Actualité juive*, January 15, 2016, <http://www.actuj.com/2016-01/france/2887-shmuel-trigano-de-quoi-la-kippa-est-elle-le-nom>.

³⁵Trigano, “De quoi la kippah est-elle le nom?” One week later, in a similar vein, Trigano wrote an additional commentary that, while not mentioning the hijab, insisted that the controversy over the kippah was a massive distraction from the real problem: violent militant Islam. Shmuel Trigano, “Quand le débat sur le kippa cache le vrai débat sur la violence au nom de l’islam,” *Actualité juive*, January 21, 2016, <http://www.actuj.com/2016-01/france/2901-shmuel-trigano-quand-le-debat-sur-le-kippa-cache-le-vrai-debat-sur-la-violence-au-nom-de-l-islam>.

³⁶For further development of Trigano’s ideas in this vein, see Trigano, “Journey through French Anti-Semitism”; and for the misgivings I share with Maud Mandel, see Ethan B. Katz and Maud S. Mandel, “Strange Journey: A Response to Shmuel Trigano,” *Jewish Review of Books* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 47–48. For Trigano’s response, see Shmuel Trigano, “The View from Paris: A Rejoinder to Ethan Katz and Maud Mandel,” *Jewish Review of Books* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 49–50.

Indeed, a number of commentators denounced the kippah as “a provocation.”³⁷ Two of the most prominent were French intellectuals Rony Brauman and Eric Zemmour (both secular Jews themselves), each of whom elicited controversy when he criticized the public wearing of the kippah in a radio interview. Both Brauman and Zemmour framed their critiques in part through the kippah-hijab connection. Zemmour, a controversial, conservative author and polemicist, claimed that for Jews, wearing a kippah in republican France was like donning the notorious yellow star by choice. Until fairly recently, he insisted, Jews had been a model of integration because they had understood that *laïcité* entailed the “total separation of sacred from profane, of private from public.” Zemmour asked pointedly why one should defend the public wearing of the kippah but not of the Islamic veil. Denouncing the former as “a religious selfie,” he claimed that it helped to bring about what he called “the fortuitous encounter between the kippah and the machete.”³⁸ In this manner, Zemmour suggested that the public wearing of a kippah was a provocation, much to blame for the attempted murder of a Jew.

For his part, Brauman, former president of the humanitarian organization *Médécins sans frontières* (Doctors without borders), attacked the kippah from two vantage points. First, he claimed that by donning a kippah, “one affirms a political affiliation, a sign of fidelity to the State of Israel and what is more problematic, a sign of allegiance to the policy of the State of Israel.” Brauman thus made a striking and troubling conflation: a traditional article of pious religious attire became, in his somewhat bizarre rendering, an endorsement of the controversial policies of a foreign state. Furthermore, he argued that defending the kippah was highly inconsistent on the part of French officials. “The Republic,” he claimed, “in its laic vision, which pushes religious signs outside of the public sphere, exhibits such a sign this time. When a woman with [an Islamic] veil is attacked, it is a matter of [the need] to put away religious signs; it is different when it is a man with a kippah who is attacked. There is a double standard.”³⁹ Brauman thus indicated that Jews wearing the

³⁷On widespread accusations of this sort, see Zachmann, “Happy Jew,” 284 n. 9. As she notes, during the debate over the kippah affair, *Le Monde* even felt compelled to run a story defending the kippah; see Julia Pascual, “A Créteil: ‘Le kippa n’est ni ostentatoire, ni une provocation,’” January 14, 2016, https://www.lemonde.fr/religions/article/2016/01/14/a-creteil-la-kippa-n-est-ni-ostentatoire-ni-une-provocation_4846946_1653130.html.

³⁸For an audio recording of Zemmour’s entire statement, see “‘La kippa est une sorte de selfie religieux,’ déplore Éric Zemmour,” RTL (website), January 14, 2016, <http://www.rtl.fr/actu/debats-societe/la-kippa-est-une-sort-de-selfie-religieux-deplore-eric-zemmour-7781334028>.

³⁹Rony Brauman, quoted in “Rony Brauman: ‘La kippa est un signe politique d’affiliation à la politique de l’Etat d’Israël,’” *Le Monde Juif*, January 16, 2016, <https://www.lemondejuif.info/2016/01/rony-brauman-la-kippa-est-un-signe-politique-daffiliation-a-la-politique-de-letat-disrael/>.

kippah not only showed their unflinching support for Israeli policy; they also violated *laïcité* in a manner never permitted from Muslims.

If for President Hollande it was intolerable that Jews in France should be pressured to conceal their religious identities, for both Zemmour and Brauman the scandal was the opposite: that Jews felt the inclination to trumpet these identities so publicly in the first place and that, unlike Muslims, they were allowed to do so. From a range of vantage points, then, the kippah affair became inextricably linked to the question of the hijab and other Muslim attire. Some insisted that the kippah was different and must be permitted. In other renderings, Jewish and Muslim bodies, because of how they symbolically expressed their faith—through what they consumed or what they wore—were together cast out of the secular republican mainstream once more.

Later that year, the national debate over the burkini appeared yet again to assign parallel but also disparate meanings to Jewish and Muslim public religious attire. In August 2016, traditionally observant Muslim women on several public beaches in France were arrested for wearing burkinis: swimwear that revealed only their faces. Several mayors moved to ban the wearing of the burkini on their local beaches. Many on the Right claimed that the garment constituted only the latest provocation by France's Islamists in their flagrant rejection of Western values. From the Left, both President Hollande and Prime Minister Valls of the Socialist government spoke out against the garment as a threat to public order and values, even as they stopped short of endorsing a national ban. Eventually, France's highest court, the Conseil d'Etat, ruled that the local bans violated the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, but the debate continued.

The terms in which Valls sought to frame his opposition to the burkini were highly revealing and familiar. After the decision of the Conseil d'Etat, he took to Facebook and explained his position in support of the bans: "Denouncing the burkini in no way [threatens] the religious freedom of the individual. There is no freedom that imprisons women. Rather [to denounce the burkini] is to denounce a mortifying, retrograde Islamism." In the same Facebook post, he also called for Muslims to build an "Islam of France."⁴⁰ This statement implied that with the right modern adaptations under French tutelage, Islam could finally become more enlightened and compatible with

⁴⁰Manuel Valls, "Assumons le débat sur le burkini," Facebook, August 26, 2016, <https://fr-fr.facebook.com/notes/manuel-valls/assumons-le-d%C3%A9bat-sur-le-burkini/1125932284153781/>. See also "Manuel Valls persiste: 'Dénoncer le burkini, c'est dénoncer un islamisme mortifère, rétrograde,'" Franceinfo (website), August 26, 2016, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/religion/laicite/polemique-sur-le-burkini/arrete-anti-burkini-invalide-pour-manuel-valls-la-decision-du-conseil-d-etat-n-epuise-pas-le-debat_1796891.html.

the duties (including sartorial ones) of citizenship. Valls made this position more explicit a few days later when he declared: “Marianne, symbol of the Republic, is bare breasted because she is feeding the people; she is not veiled because she is free! That is the Republic!”⁴¹

Like many others, Valls appeared entirely unaware that the burkini is a type of swimwear that emerged recently from an effort among many pious Muslim women to negotiate with the modern world and that has provoked condemnation from the likes of ISIS.⁴² The prime minister instead conveyed a common assumption: women would only cover themselves in restrictive swimwear if forced to do so by their husbands or a religious authority. No woman would freely choose this article of clothing that made her less free and less modern and encumbered her body in the public sphere.⁴³ Thus, even if at first glance the burkini affair had little immediate relation to Jews, it ultimately reinscribed the same supercessionist logic as that seen in the controversy over school lunches. Once again, a state official treated as accepted fact the view that by placing constraints on the body, a religious practice traditional to Muslims and Jews constitutes an obstacle to the full exercise of modern French citizenship. Indeed, the burkini resembles the swimwear of religious Jewish women who go to public beaches in France and elsewhere.

Conclusion

If there was a political bookend to the period that began with the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher, it would seem to have been the presidential elections of 2016–17. Nowhere was this clearer than in the recurrent centrality of Jews and Muslims—and their frequent inseparability—in political rhetoric. In a radio interview on November 23, 2016, former prime minister and then leading presidential candidate François Fillon caused an uproar

⁴¹Manuel Valls, quoted in “Marianne, le voile et les droits des femmes: Les propos de Valls agacent une historienne,” *Big Browser* (blog), *Le Monde*, August 30, 2016, https://www.lemonde.fr/big-browser/article/2016/08/30/marianne-le-voile-et-les-droits-des-femmes-les-propos-de-manuel-valls-agacent-une-historienne_4989910_4832693.html.

Valls’s statement was not only a narrow rendering of the meaning of republican citizenship; it was also a historically inaccurate account of most images of Marianne since the time of the French Revolution.

⁴²Olivier Roy, interview with Juliette Duclos, “‘Pour les femmes qui le portent, le burkini est un compromis entre la modernité et la foi,’” Franceinfo (website), August 21, 2016, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/religion/laicite/polemique-sur-le-burkini/pour-les-femmes-qui-le-portent-leburkiniest-un-compromis-entre-la-modernite-et-la-foi_1593515.html.

⁴³Many of these sorts of assumptions are analyzed and problematized in Scott, *Politics of the Veil*. For an in-depth study of female agency within the context of traditional Islamic religious practices and garb, see Saba Mahmoud, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ, 2005).

as he responded to a question about Muslim integration in France. He opined: “We must fight fundamentalism [in the Muslim community], as at other times in the past we fought a form of Catholic fundamentalism, as we fought the will of Jews to live in a community that does not respect all the laws of the French Republic.”⁴⁴ A little more than one month earlier, another contender to Fillon’s right—Front National leader Marine Le Pen—explained that as president she would forbid *all* “ostentatious religious signs,” including not only the hijab but also the kippah. Le Pen expressed her confidence that many French Jews were ready to make this “small sacrifice” for the greater good.⁴⁵ In February 2017 she reiterated this proposal, and a few days later she added a new one: all citizens of non-European countries would have to give up either their non-French or their French citizenship. This proposal clearly targeted primarily the large number of Muslims who are citizens of both France and a country in North Africa, but Le Pen affirmed that she would also bar anyone from maintaining both Israeli and French citizenship.⁴⁶

At first blush, it might be tempting to see these statements—all of which elicited fierce critique from the official Jewish community leadership—simply as classic cases of an appeal to a right-wing, Catholic-inflected ultranationalism, frequently tinged with antisemitism, that retains a foothold in conservative French politics.⁴⁷ Yet such an assessment would occlude the inescapable links between Le Pen’s and Fillon’s formulations and the wider discourse we have traced here: one of republican, secularist ways of thinking and speaking about Jews and Muslims that has repeatedly emerged at a series of flash points since the horrific events of January 2015.⁴⁸

⁴⁴François Fillon, quoted in “Le grand rabbin réagit aux propos de Fillon quant à un communautarisme juif,” *Le Monde*, November 23, 2016, https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2016/11/23/le-grand-rabbin-reagit-aux-propos-de-fillon-quant-a-un-communautarisme-juif_5036590_4854003.html.

⁴⁵Marine Le Pen, quoted in Nissim Behar, “Interdiction de la kippa: Marine Le Pen hérisse Israël,” *Libération*, October 28, 2016, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/10/18/interdiction-de-la-kippa-marine-le-pen-herisse-israel_1522826.

⁴⁶Éric Hazan, “Marine Le Pen persiste: ‘Interdire le port de la kippa pour lutter contre le fondamentalisme,’” *Le Monde Juif.info* (website), February 4, 2017, <https://www.lemondejuif.info/2017/02/marine-pen-persiste-interdire-port-de-kippa-lutter-contre-fondamentalisme/>; “Les Franco-Israéliens bannis fulminent contre le projet de Le Pen de bannir la double nationalité,” *JForum.fr* (website), February 14, 2017, <http://www.jforum.fr/les-franco-israeliens-bannis-fulminent-contre-le-pen.html>.

⁴⁷Indeed, I have emphasized this aspect elsewhere. See Ethan Katz, “How Marine Le Pen Relies on Dividing French Jews and Muslims,” *Atlantic*, April 19, 2017.

⁴⁸In a related vein, Emile Chabal argues that a neorepublicanism has become as much the property of Le Pen’s party as that of the Center Right or the Left. See Emile Chabal, “From the *Banlieue* to the Burkini: The Many Lives of French Republicanism,” *Modern and Contemporary France* 25, no. 1 (2017): 68–74.

Such discourses have had a tangible impact on Jewish lives in at least two ways. The first is the interiorization of signs of Jewishness among a certain segment of the community. Thus, for instance, security concerns are not the only reason that more than a few Jews have opted to wear baseball caps over their kippahs; indeed, many have done so even when indoors or walking to and from synagogue in their readily identifiable Sabbath attire.⁴⁹ Second, a number of Jews departing France for Israel have cited increasingly overbearing public secularism as a key factor, at least as important as security concerns or the pull of Zionism. A January 2016 report of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency quoted individuals who explained their choice to make aliyah by noting that in France, as visible Jews, they have come to feel like “outsiders who need to be tolerated.”⁵⁰

In recent years, many commentators have focused on the prevalence of Islamophobia in France; substantial attention has been devoted as well to the problem of antisemitism among a significant portion of the country’s Muslims. But in the tensions that currently beset the triangular relationship between Jews, Muslims, and the French state and society, there is a third crucial element, too often overlooked, that this article has sought to highlight: Jews face an uncertain position vis-a-vis the Republic and *laïcité*. So long as they are invoked as at once a special case constitutive of the Republic and a group that, like Muslims, tests the boundaries of acceptable public religion and culture, it will be difficult to convince many of France’s Jews that their condition is not one of crisis.

⁴⁹Here I follow Zachmann, “The Happy Jew,” 282. In analyzing such choices, it is of course difficult to disentangle the issue of social pressure from that of security fears, which have also clearly influenced ideas about Jewish visibility in contemporary France.

⁵⁰Cnaan Liphshiz, “French Jews Leaving in Record Numbers—But Not for the Reason You Think,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency (website), January 5, 2016, <https://www.jta.org/2016/01/05/news-opinion/world/french-jews-leaving-in-record-numbers-but-not-for-the-reason-you-think>.