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IX

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*edited by*

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## Globalising French Jewish Politics

July 2–3, 2019

*Conference Report by Noémie Duhaut*

French Jewish politics have often been studied through the lens of a single organisation or in isolation from the broader European and international contexts. Historically, however, French Jewish actors have been well integrated into transnational, transimperial, and global networks. This conference aimed to revisit the history of French Jewish politics, within the broader contexts of diaspora politics, Jewish and non-Jewish internationalism, and transnational mobility. The panellists also sought to complicate notions of Frenchness and French Jewish identity, probe for/into the impact of such international ties and endeavors upon French Jewish politics and investigate the transformation and legacy of political practices in the *longue durée*. A secondary aim was to reflect on the French Jewish self-perceptions often inscribed in the archives and used by scholars in the field. The conference took place at the Central European University in Budapest on July 2–3, 2019 and brought together doctoral students, early career researchers, and senior scholars from Europe, Israel, and the United States.

Following the greetings and opening remarks of Noémie Duhaut, Nina Valbousquet, and Carsten Wilke, the first panel on the transnational aspects of nineteenth-century French Jewish politics started with a presentation by Carsten Wilke (Budapest) exploring the limits of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle's* supranational ideology. Did its universalism exist only in the organisation's name? Was the organisation, in practice, only French? In his talk, Wilke challenged the depiction of the *Alliance* as a French Jewish organisation, adhering to the ideological tenets of *franco-judaïsme*, and serving a French colonial agenda, demonstrating that this view is largely anachronistic. Focusing on the example of German membership in the organisation, Wilke argued that the European political situation dictated the universalism of the organisation. After France's defeat in the Franco–Prussian war, the organisation had to cultivate a supranationalist rhetoric to keep its German adherents. It adopted ideas coming from its German membership—such as including ten German members in its central committee—to the extent that the latter came to be numerically dominant in the organisation. The *Alliance's* universalism, therefore, represented a pragmatic stance in an age of Franco-German confrontation. Barbara Lambauer's paper (Paris) explored the aid network developed by philanthropic committees and organisations throughout Europe to facilitate emigration from Central and Eastern Europe from the 1881 pogroms in Southern Russia to the outbreak of the First World War. She first showed that organisations such as the *Alliance Israélite*

*Universelle* or the *Israelitische Allianz zu Wien*, although existing as separate national organisations, worked together, sometimes funded each other, and were part of a single aid network. She then highlighted how the Jewish Colonization Association, created in 1891 by the Franco-Bavarian entrepreneur Maurice de Hirsch, a member of the central committee of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, became the principal coordinating and financing structure intervening both in the New and in the Old world at the turn of the century.

Joshua Leung (Paris) opened the second panel on Zionism and non-Zionism with a presentation on French and British Jewish activism at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and the protection of minority rights in Poland. His analysis of the interactions between the myriad of Jewish delegations and activists that came to Paris cast light on the diversity and disparity characterising Jewish politics at the largest peace conference since the 1815 Congress of Vienna. The Paris Peace Conference provided a place for the two main ideological camps—a broadly speaking assimilationist one represented by Western Jewish organisations such as the *Alliance*, the British Joint Foreign Committee, and a Zionist one, represented by the Zionist Organization—to compete for influence on the international diplomatic stage. Leung concluded that although the Zionists had gained the ascendancy during the war, it was the non-Zionists led by the Joint Foreign Committee and the *Alliance* who managed best to shape the peace in the form of the minority treaties.

Stefania Ragaù (Pisa) introduced the little-known figure of Jacques Bahar. A French Algerian Jew and an atypical thinker of the late nineteenth century, Bahar was a political journalist active during the Dreyfus affair, a socialist with anarchist positions, and a polemicist close to Bernard Lazare. Ragaù pointed to the tensions characterising Bahar's thought, between his quest to solve social questions and his views that Jewish emancipation could only ever be achieved through religious reform rather than assimilation. She argued that while Zionism initially appeared to him as a means to bring religious and social questions together, his unique brand of theocratic anarchism eventually drove him away from the Zionist movement. Joel Swanson (Chicago) concluded the panel with a paper examining the activities of the diasporist Jewish political group, *Le Cercle Gaston Crémieux*, founded in 1967 "to promote a diasporic Jewish existence without subjugation to the synagogue or Zionism." Opposed to both Zionism and assimilationism, this group included scholars such as Richard Marienstras and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. Through their historiographical writings, activists of the *Cercle Gaston Crémieux* challenged the narrative according to which nineteenth and early twentieth-century French Jews were forced to disavow Jewish political programs such as Zionism that necessitated a Jewish identity in the public sphere. Seeking to deconstruct the myths upon which this belief was founded, they instead portrayed the concept of the nation-state as a foreign

model imported into Judaism and offered the cultural memory of Jewish diasporism as a resource for replacing the idea that the nation-state alone secures political possibilities.

The first day of the conference ended with a stimulating keynote lecture by LISA LEFF (Washington, DC) on the 1892–93 Panama scandal. Although the French anti-Semitic movement of the 1890s is typically associated with the Dreyfus affair, Leff showed that it was in reality launched by the Panama affair and coalesced over a broadly shared outrage about this corrupt foreign investment scheme in which many ordinary investors lost their fortunes. Leff then looked at how this scandal turned into an anti-Semitic one and why anti-Semitism took off in a democratic regime committed to equal rights. Leff's talk analysed the social and political norm-setting functions of scandals, offering a broader reflection on the reasons why liberal democracies produce anti-Semitism.

The second day of the conference started with a panel on colonial order and a paper by Noémie Duhaut (Mainz) exploring Adolphe Crémieux's views for the organisation of French colonial society from the 1830s to the 1870s. Her paper analysed his opinions on the legal status of free people of colour in overseas colonies and of Muslims in Algeria, as well as his stance against slavery. While these issues might seem unrelated to the life of Jews in metropolitan France, they provided an opportunity to think about the boundaries of citizenship: Crémieux saw them as interconnected and as reminders of the fragility of French Jews' political and legal equality. Duhaut argued that, as a colonial legal thinker, Adolphe Crémieux did not overcome the racial prejudices of French republican universalism.

Yuval Tal (Baltimore) offered an analysis of Jewish class politics in French Algeria, focusing on early twentieth-century Constantine. Tal examined the political tactics of a group of young middle-class Jews hit by material decline vis-à-vis local Jewish notables, such as forming alliances with settler elites including, rather unexpectedly, the city's anti-Jewish mayor. Tal showed that, while these tactics could succeed in the short term, they did not offer a solution to their exclusion from the European settler society as members of a Jewish collective rather than as individuals. This realisation, in turn, led this group of young Jews to formulate a critique of republican universalism and frame their political organisation as overtly Jewish. Tal argued that this advocacy for Jewish rights, however, did not modify their ultimate political vision, as this group still sought the full integration of the Jews, as individuals, into French society.

Zoë Roth (Durham) concluded this panel with a presentation on the role of Algerian Jews in anticolonial movements during the Algerian War of Independence. While most Jews remained loyal to the French colonial state, a minority of Algerian Jews took up arms against the French forces. Recovering the history of anticolonial Jewish activism helps debunk the myth of Jewish passivity during

the Algerian war while their autobiographical writings disrupt the dominant “nostalgia” narrative and complicate the colonial system’s stark division of Jews and Muslims. Focusing on Daniel Timsit’s *Algérie: Récit anachronique* (1998), Roth argued that the poetics of Jewish memoirs about anticolonialism are central to understanding not only this political engagement but also a broader shift in the interpretation of the Algerian War as a global event. The text’s literary elements indeed constructed the connections between fascism and colonialism that underpinned Jewish anticolonial activism in Algeria and later during May 1968.

The second panel of the day centred around the Second World War. Darcy C. Benson (Columbus) offered an analysis of the prewar role of labor unions and the Communist Party in forming the Parisian FTP-MOI brigade. A militant communist organisation composed of immigrants and first-generation French men and women in which Jews formed a sizable sub-group, the unit would become an important resistance organisation during the war. Benson argued that, through their membership in the French Communist Party immigrant arm, and in trade unions, members of the future FTP-MOI brigade forged personal community ties and gained a valuable organisational infrastructure already in the 1930s. Unlike other resistance networks which had no pre-existing framework, the unit could rely on a pre-war structure to organise clandestine activity during the war. For Jewish members of the brigade, the interwar organisation of members of the Communist Party and the main French labour union according to language groups proved critical. Immigrant and French Jews could uniquely choose to belong to a language group, a Jewish group and/or the French arms of each organisation, a position which enabled them to establish more connections.

In her talk, Nina Valbusquet (Rome) reminded the audience that the Crémieux decree was revoked not once but twice during the Second World War—first by the Vichy regime in October 1940 and then, more surprisingly, by the French commander in chief for Algeria, general Henri Giraud, in March 1943. Her paper analysed how this second abrogation set off in motion global Jewish organisations that turned this affair from a domestic one to an international *cause célèbre*. Valbusquet argued that the fate of Algerian Jews provided Jewish defence organisations in the United States and elsewhere with an opportunity to address anti-Semitism during the Holocaust and situate the fight for Jewish rights within a broader international defence of human rights.

Finally, Stacy Renee Veeder’s paper (Charleston) analysed the advocacy, aid, and entreaty efforts of Jewish families and communities in Occupied France. Scholarship has concentrated on the efforts of French and international organisations to provide humanitarian and medical aid. Personal letters sent from the camps requesting provisions and assistance mobilised aid networks nevertheless

formed an integral part of complex survival strategies. Veeder furthermore discussed letters appealing to French authorities on behalf of Jews interned in the Occupied Zone camps, whose relatives and friends often were of Eastern or Central European origin or descent. The paper demonstrated how the correspondence and entreaties of Jewish internees from the camps of Occupied France and their advocates expressed nuanced notions of identity and integration, revealing a multifarious discourse regarding republicanism, universalism, and Jewish and French identity.

The concluding panel of the conference explored the politics of education and memory in the wake of the Holocaust. Focusing on the organisation's schools in Morocco and Iran in the postwar era, Nadia Malinovich (Paris) questioned the extent to which the Second World War and the creation of the State of Israel represented a watershed for the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. She showed that the revision of its ideology and its adoption of a more pro-Zionist stance did not take place overnight. Crucially, in both Morocco and Iran, the 1950s and early 1960s saw the expansion of the AIU network and the organisation remained committed to its pre-War mission of "emancipating" Jewish children through secular and French language education. Decolonisation, the Holocaust, and the creation of the State of Israel, as well as external pressures from both the Jewish Agency and the American Joint Distribution Committee, which began to subsidise the *Alliance* after the war, led the Alliance to give new importance to the Jewish component of its educational programme.

Finally, Dominic Williams (Leeds) presented a paper on Claude Lanzmann's multidirectional politics, offering a new take on Lanzmann's creation of a particular kind of Holocaust memory. His *Shoah* is seen as one of the critical texts asserting the uniqueness and incomparability of the Holocaust. Lanzmann's cinematography, however, needs to be placed in the context of French Jewish politics and culture of the time. Williams's paper addressed this broader context, recalling the director's role as a founding member of the *Cercle Gaston Crémieux* with its specific project of left-wing Jewish secularism or his participation in debates about colonialism and the situation in Israel/Palestine in the pages of *Les Temps modernes*. In so doing, Williams pointed to ways in which Lanzmann's activities, and therefore *the film Shoah* itself, could be seen as participating in structures described as multidirectional memory, as well as multidirectional activism in a broader sense.

## Conference Overview

### Day 1

***Transnational Aspects of Nineteenth-Century French Jewish Politics***, chaired by Miklós Konrád (Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

Carsten Wilke (Central European University): *Not French, but Universal: The Supranational Ideology and Practice of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in the Age of Franco–German Confrontation*

Barbara Lambauer (SIRICE, Paris): *Connectors between East and West: The Alliance Israélite Universelle, the Jewish Colonization Association and the Exodus from Central and Eastern Europe, 1881–1914*

***French Jews and Zionism***, chaired by Mary Gluck (Brown University)

Joshua Leung (Science Po Paris): *French and British Jewish Activism at the Paris Peace Conference and the Protection of Minority Rights in Poland*

Stefania Ragà (Scuola Normale Superiore Pisa): *Theocratic Anarchism in Jacques Bahar's Zionist Utopia: An Unusual Voice of French Jewish Politics between Humanism and Zionism*

Joel Swanson (The University of Chicago): *A Pathologically Abnormal Situation: Le Cercle Gaston Crémieux and the Possibility of a non-French French Jewishness*

***The Panama Affair: An Antisemitic Scandal in an Age of Globalization***, keynote Lecture by Lisa M. Leff, Professor of History, American University & Director, Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

### Day 2

***Accommodating, Shaping, and Challenging the Colonial Order***, chaired by Lisa M. Leff (Washington)

Noémie Duhaut (Leibniz-Institute of European History, Mainz): *Adolphe Crémieux, a Typical Failed French Universalist?*

Yuval Tal (Johns Hopkins University): *Jewish Class Politics and Critique of Republican Universalism in French Algeria*

Zoë Roth (Durham University): *The Poetics of Politics: Writing Jewish Anti-Colonial Activism in Algeria*

***Migrations and Refugees before and during WWII***, chaired by Constantin Iordachi (Central European University)

Darcy C. Benson (The Ohio State University): *Emerging Networks: The Prewar Role of Labor Unions and the Communist Party in Forming Paris's FTP-MOI Brigade*

Nina Valbousquet (Fordham University & Ecole Française de Rome): *An International Cause Célèbre: Transatlantic Jewish Diplomacy and the Persecution of Algerian Jews during World War II*

Stacy Veeder (College of Charleston): *Identity, Resistance and Relief in Correspondence from the Jewish Internees of Occupied France, 1940–1944*

***Politics of Memory and Education in the Wake of the Holocaust***, chaired by Carsten Wilke (Central European University)

Nadia Malinovich (Groupe Sociétés Religions Laïcités, CNRS/EPHE, PSL Research University): *Continuity and Change in the Schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Morocco and Iran in the Postwar Era*

Dominic Williams (University of Leeds): *Claude Lanzmann: Multidirectional Politics*

### ***Concluding discussion***

#### **Conveners:**

Noémie Duhaut, Leibniz-Institute of European History, Mainz

Nina Valbousquet, Fordham University & École Française de Rome

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