



Maud Mandel.- *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

Ethan Katz.- *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

In a post-Charlie Hebdo, post-13 November era, it is virtually impossible to think about politics and society in France without reference to the rise of radical Islam and antisemitism. France, a country that is home to some of the biggest populations of Jews and Muslims in Europe, is commonly described as a boiling pot of ethnic and religious tensions between the two minority communities. Authorities and commenters continue to point fingers the susceptibility of France's Muslim population—poorly integrated, historically marginalized, and harboring age-old ethno-religious antipathies—to radical Islamist movements imported from abroad. This understanding continues to align France's Muslims—as a monolithic group—against both Jews and the secular state.

On the other hand, responding to escalating antisemitic attacks instigated by radical Islamic as well as right-Right Nationalists, a significant portion of France's diverse Jewish community, today primarily North African in origin or descent, has sharply responded in line with the state. Echoing nineteenth century attempts to render their difference invisible, some Jewish authorities have even urged their communities to assimilate further. As recently as January 2016 in Marseille, after a teenager attacked a Jewish teacher with a machete, claiming to be acting in the name of the Islamic state, the head of

the local religious community warned local Jews against wearing the *kippa* in public.

The lines here have long been drawn rather crudely in the sand between North African Muslims who refuse to shed their ethnic and religious particularities, and Jews, who do; a schema that underscores a historical and fundamental antipathy between the two.

The picture is more complicated. The assailant in the Marseille case was neither a poorly integrated North African Muslim Arab (or the son or grandson of one), nor an agent of Daesh, but rather an ethnic Kurd from a family of recent immigrants from Turkey who was found to have acted completely on his own. Leading figures in French Muslim life have stood in unity with the state against terrorism, violence, and hatred in the wake of the Paris attacks in November.¹ Among the North African Muslim community, concerns have been voiced specifically about the percolation of ethno-religious hatreds among recent generations of North African Muslim youth who do not possess any memories of the “good relations” between Jews and Muslims in the countries of their parents and grandparents: Hassen Chalghoumi, the imam of Drancy who has been active in Muslim-Jewish rapprochement, has gone on record to state the urgent need to develop a “French Islam,” beginning with training Muslim clergy in France rather than importing them from abroad.²

Official and individual Jewish responses are also complex: the chief rabbi of France and the head of CRIF both urged France’s Jews to continue to wear the *kippa* rather than take a “defeatist attitude.” French Jewish thinker Bernard-Henri Lévy has articulated a stand against twenty-first century antisemitism by arguing Jews need to claim their identity as Frenchmen in affirming their Jewishness.³ Reflecting a sense of communal insecurity, CRIF and other Jewish organizations have recently reported a rapid increase in the number of Jewish families who, no longer seeing a future for their children or community in the French republic, have chosen to immigrate to Israel.⁴ Yet different reports also suggest Jews are choosing to leave because of economic instability. Most interestingly, many attribute these numbers to a growing

1. Julia Pascual et Cécile Chambraud, “Les musulmans redoutent <<le piège de la division>> in *Le Monde* 30 Jan 2016 http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/01/30/les-musulmans-redoutent-le-piege-de-la-division_4856466_3224.html

2. «Laëtitia Enriquez, Interview with Hassen Chalghoumi, << Le Monde arabe rejette l’islam politique. Pourquoi pas en France?>> in *Actualité juive Hebdo*, 12 April 2016 <http://www.actuj.com/2016-04/france/3342-hassen-chalghoumi-le-monde-arabe-rejette-l-islam-politique-pourquoi-pas-en-france>.

3. See recent essay by Bernard Henri Lévy, *L’esprit du Judaïsme* (Paris: Grasset, 2016)

4. *Vice News*, “Jewish leaders in Paris speak of Community in Fear,” 5 April 2016. <https://news.vice.com/video/jewish-leaders-in-paris-speak-of-community-in-fear>

sentiment of “alienation from an adamantly secularist society increasingly intolerant of the religiously devout.”⁵ It is interesting to think about the ways in which this increasing militancy in secularism simultaneously impacts Jews and Muslims in France, especially in light of recent cabinet discussions (April 2016) in which Prime Minister Valls proposed a new ban on women’s headscarves in universities. These would accompany bans already made in the 2000s on the *niqab* and *burka*.

The complex connections between on the one hand, the security crises posed by Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, and ethnically motivated violence in France, and on the other, Jews’ and Muslims’ multiple responses to a rising militancy in secularism in French civil society, signal an acute need to think carefully about the relationships between Jews and Muslims in France and her former overseas territories, as well as the specific geographical and temporal contexts within which these relationships have developed. Most strikingly left out of conversations about interethnic hatreds and violence is the role of the state in creating these contexts, exacerbating tensions, and consequently cementing political positions along ethnic and religious lines. Maud Mandel’s *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict* and Ethan Katz’s *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France* address these glaring and urgent issues of significance to scholars and specialists of modern Judaism and Islam, of France and North Africa, and of Europe and the world. These serious and insightful historical studies of the subject are also supremely readable and accessible to educated and interested non-specialist publics alike.

Katz’s monograph spans WWI through the present day, and Mandel’s book focuses on the post-1948 period. These works clarify and enrich one another. Katz peers into the variety of interactions and relationships between Jews and Muslims across North Africa and France to argue that conflict and concord were above all “situational.” Mandel homes in on the question of how the Israel-Palestine conflict came to define Jewish-Muslim relations in France along ethno-religious lines, and more specifically, the history of the colonial and post-colonial state’s part in hardening these lines - by setting up minorities against one another.

5. Cnaan Liphshiz, “The Real Reason French Jews are Leaving France in Record Numbers,” in *The Forward* (6 Jan 2016) <http://forward.com/news/breaking-news/328789/the-real-reason-french-jews-are-leaving-france-in-record-numbers/>; Cnaan Liphshiz, “French Jews leaving in record numbers—but not for the reason you think,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (5 Jan 2016) <http://www.jta.org/2016/01/05/news-opinion/world/french-jews-leaving-in-record-numbers-but-not-for-the-reason-you-think>; for a more extended reflection on the subject, see Jeffrey Goldberg, “Is it Time for the Jews to Leave Europe?” in *The Atlantic* (April 2015) <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/04/is-it-time-for-the-jews-to-leave-europe/386279/>

Both intervene in French, Jewish, Muslim, European, and world histories in a number of critical ways. Both demonstrate that interethnic tension in France was far from “natural” or predetermined, and furthermore, draw out a holistic geography of France, North Africa, and the Middle East by emphasizing the flow of people, ideas, movements, and information across the Mediterranean. Both argue for a layering of macro and micro lenses to examine the rich locales of interaction between Jews and Muslims. And finally, both tell novel stories of the XXth and XXIst centuries that not only breathe life into figures, groups, and relationships that are often relegated to oversimplified and clichéd narratives of “age-old” conflict, but also underline the complex place of the past in determining these communities’ behaviors and responses to contemporary events. Muslim-Jewish relations in France have been built on individuals’ and groups’ interpretations of a number of global, national, and local historical narratives and experiences rather than on ethnic and religious difference alone. This point is particularly salient to colonial and post-colonial settings in a modern global context in which world events can, and often do, ‘hit home.’

Katz’s central claim is not only that ethnic and religious difference have not predetermined relations between Jews and Muslims in France, but that Jews and Muslims’ ethno-religious identities are constructed and situational, “highly amorphous, contingent, ever-shifting categories in modern France, constructed both from outside and within.” (Katz, 5) “Jewishness” and “Muslimness” are multi-faceted, embody multiple meanings and often at once. In spite of holding real significance for Jews and Muslims, themselves, these categories involve “many different types of self-understandings and interactions.” (Katz, 5) Katz’s work shows how the fluidity and diversity of relations between Jews and Muslims across France and North Africa in the post-WWI period is deeply embedded within a rigid set of questions about national colonial, postcolonial, and communal identity not unfamiliar to specialists of modern French history.⁶ As these and other works of cultural history lay plain, the idea of an exclusive French identity was an evolving project tackled by diverse actors over multiple colonial and postcolonial geographies, and Katz’s contribution reminds us that a lot more took, and continues to take place within this project of national identity-building than we may have previously imagined.

6. For instance, see Herman Lebovicz, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). For a recently published case study on the battles for the meaning of “Frenchness” at the turn of the century, see Frederick Brown, *For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus* (New York: Knopf, 2011).

This point is particularly evident in a chapter on “Jews as Muslims and Muslims as Jews,” which explores the ways Vichy racial laws not only violently redefined who was “French,” but also who was “Jewish,” “Muslim,” and even “Arab.” Prior to the Second World War, Katz describes how Jews and Muslims of various provenances often settled in the same urban immigrant neighborhoods, building and patronizing business enterprises and families, and partaking in the same socio-economic worlds. In the case of Jews and Muslims from Arab territories, these groups shared North African food, language, traditions, and background. The Nazi Occupation and the Vichy regime abruptly imposed rigid regulations that required an awkward and often traumatic redefinition of these categories: Jewish citizenship was revoked, and Arab Muslims were made Aryan. In 1942, Jews and Muslims in multi-ethnic and multi-religious families, not entirely uncommon, suddenly found themselves having to answer questions about religion and race for the sake of their property and lives. Katz underlines the range of choices available to individual Muslims and Muslim communities. While there was considerable sympathy for the German side among Muslims, Katz describes the complicated “intense imperial struggle for Muslim hearts and minds,” in which antisemitism was wielded as a tool among many others to mobilize Muslim support among Arab populations in France and North Africa for both the Allied and Axis war efforts. One of the most dramatic stories of Muslim choice that indicate a fascinating navigation of ethnic and religious categories is the curious case of the rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris and the Institut Musulman, Si Kaddour Benghabrit. In an act of resistance that for many years went unrecognized, Benghabrit manipulated his precarious position between collaborator and *resistant* to rescue over 1,700 North African Jews by giving them false Muslim ancestry documents (Katz, 120-125).

On the heels of war and genocide, definitions of “Jew” and “Muslim” were once again reshuffled rapidly and awkwardly. French expressions of antisemitism in the final years of the war contributed to the development of Zionism and ethnic solidarities among Jews, and anticolonialism flourished among a growing number of Muslims who felt doubly deceived by the French failure to implement any significant reforms in their North African homelands. Under these conditions of shared dissatisfaction, concord could potentially develop between Muslims and Jews. Mandel argues, the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and the declaration of Israeli independence coincided with the maturation and expansion of North African anti-colonial movements, which “gave the struggle between Israel and her neighbors a powerful local resonance.” (Mandel, 15) Yet Marseille figured as an incubator of unparalleled tensions between Jews and Muslims because of the visibility of France’s unequal approach to its relationships with its Muslim and Jewish denizens as well

as French actions on the global political stage. In this Mediterranean port city, displaced North African Arabs and migrant workers from France's North African colonies lived in close proximity to Ashkenazi and North African Sephardi Jews *en route* to the new and independent state of Israel, a migration movement largely supported by the French state. This argument sets the stage for Mandel's broad and rich discussion of the ways in which France's uneven policies toward North African Muslims and Jews of various provenances shaped relationships between these communities in the post-1948 era.

In the case above, and in many others in his monograph, Katz's definition of "situational" relationships between Jews and Muslims highlights the role of the state in determining how Jews and Muslims identify themselves and one another at any particular moment. This is also one of the most powerful and overarching implications of Mandel's analysis of the post-1948 period. Mandel's analysis moves seamlessly from describing the connections between the micro and local settings of interactions and tensions, to the state's responses and actions regarding both national and global events. For Mandel, conflict between Jews and Muslims in post-1948 France has been shaped primarily by processes internal to France. This, as both Mandel and Katz argue, includes the legal, economic, and social inequalities between Jewish and Muslim subjects and citizens imposed and perpetuated by the state throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, Mandel points out, these inter-ethnic and inter-religious attitudes were further hardened by the state's role in global events, in particular, North African decolonization. Challenging a clichéd image of French Jews and Muslims rallying along opposing ethnic lines drawn by the Arab-Israeli conflicts in the Middle East, Mandel offers a nuanced and thoughtful reflection on the role of the French state in creating interethnic conflict and, more broadly, France's place in twentieth century world history.

One of Mandel's most striking chapters explores Muslim-Jewish relations in 1968, underlining the fascinating and decidedly under-examined ethno-religious story about the protests in the streets and the uprisings in universities and factories (Mandel, 100-124). Exposing new local and global dimensions to the furor that exploded across France in the late sixties, Mandel describes how young Jews and Muslims mobilized during this revolutionary moment to either support Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state or to champion Palestinians' right to self-determination. Politics in this overseas conflict, like others Mandel explores, were frequently grafted onto local, regional and national struggles. In this case, first generation French Muslims from North African families, victims of colonization and the wars of decolonization who had, and continued to live in terrible conditions of poverty, suffering

from discrimination and marginalization in the metropole, met the outraged descendants of Jewish Holocaust victims and survivors in the streets and in the universities. Both groups drew on their own family and community histories of marginalization, persecution, violence, and displacement to make their voices heard on political issues in the Middle East, be it supporting the existence of a Jewish state or protesting Zionism and the state of Israel as violent colonialism over Arab populations.

The 1967 war had surely begun to harden many ‘soft’ positions on this subject along ethnic lines (Mandel, 80-81), but Mandel’s investigation reveals some surprising alliances and positions held by young Jewish and Muslim leftists and activists on the ground in 68. A number of Leftist Jews joined pro-Palestinian Arab and non-Arab activists to protest and oppose Zionism as a violent colonialism in the name of their parents’ experiences of persecution during the Shoah. Muslim opinions were also divided and diverse. Even after the *Mouvement de travailleurs arabes* (MTA) broke off from the mixed Arab and non-Arab French *gauchistes* of the *Comités Palestines* to pursue pro-Palestinian activity, arguing “even sympathetic French intellectuals could not fully understand the problems facing Muslim immigrants or their attachment to the Arab world,” (Mandel, 111-112) the non-Arab Left remained involved in the movement. Over a short time, however, the MTA made decisions to bring Muslim immigrants’ issues in France to the fore of its activism, reflecting a significant communal critique that instead of fight battles abroad, the group should privilege local issues in France, such as structural inequalities, improving housing, wages, factory working conditions. While police reports suggest a great proportion of the North African Muslim immigrant community in France was uneducated, uninterested, and apolitical, Mandel points out this apparent apathy may have indicated Muslims’ fear of involvement rather than their disinterest. This glimpse into the complexities of pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian politics in France on the heels of the “revolutionary moment” of 1968 demonstrate how relations between Jews and Muslims were layered with situational meanings, and complex in their spaces of tension and concord.

These studies are of profound importance for both specialists and non-specialists alike. With their monographs, Katz and Mandel contribute essential nuance to the question of Jewish-Muslim relations in France by underlining their situational nature, their diversity, and the role of the French colonial and postcolonial state—as well as that of non-Jews and non-Muslims—in mitigating these relationships and interactions. These core interventions—reminders to readers that the local, national and post/colonial *matters*—are of supreme importance, particularly in an era in which media and technology have

rendered the global increasingly intimate, and easy to evoke in discussions about local behaviors and phenomena. Although the Israel-Palestine conflict surely remains important, and increasingly so, Jews and Muslims in France have consistently made social, cultural, and political choices based on a great many factors and experiences beyond it. While positions on Israel and Palestine have largely crystalized along ethnic and religious lines, particularly in recent years, Jews and Muslims continue to have access to a variety of interpretations of their family, community, and national pasts—individual and shared—that may shape their politics and attitudes in the present and the future. Katz and Mandel’s historical studies offer observations fundamental to a reasonable and humane assessment of the possibility for interethnic relations today. Under the strains of unprecedented dangers to national security through terrorism, along with a rising number of individual acts of antisemitic and Islamophobic violence, it is tempting to fall back on clichéd and inaccurate tropes of eternal hatreds inflamed by conflict in the Middle East, and much more challenging to think of the specific contexts that help shape groups and individuals’ attitudes toward one another. Maud Mandel and Ethan Katz have done precisely this, and in doing so, together have told a very important twentieth century story that has real repercussions for the twenty-first.

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