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Comme un village méditerranéen: postcolonial North African Jewish de- and re-racialization in Sarcelles

SAMUEL SAMI EVERETT

ABSTRACT Built from nothing on the Parisian periphery in the 1950s, the neighbourhood known as Les Flanades in Sarcelles is perhaps the single largest North African Jewish urban space in France. Though heavily policed since 2000, Les Flanades had been free from violence. However, on 20 July 2014, violence erupted close to the central synagogue (known as *la grande syna*') during a banned pro-Palestinian march. The violence pitted protestors and residents against one another in a schematic Israel *v.* Palestine frame leading to confrontations between many descendants of North African Jews and Muslims. Using that moment as a strong indicator of a broken solidarity/affinity between people of North African descent, Everett's article traces a process of de-racialization, amongst Jews in Les Flanades, through the use of place names. North African Jewish residents use the local names of first-, second- and third-generation residents for their neighbourhood, ranging from from Bab El-Oued (a suburb of Algiers), via *un village méditerranéen* (a Mediterranean village), to *la petite Jérusalem* (little Jerusalem). Using the lens of postcolonial and racialization theory—a lens seldomly applied to France, and even less so to Jews in France—and a hybrid methodology that combines ethnography with discursive and genealogical analyses, Everett traces the unevenness of solidarity/affinity between Muslim and Jewish French citizens of North African descent and the messy production of de-racialization. This approach involves looking at shifting landscapes and changing dynamics of demography, religiosity and security and describing some tendencies that resist these changes consciously or not. Examples include the re-appropriation of Arabic para-liturgy and an encounter with a lawyer from Sarcelles who has taken a stand in prominent racialized public legal contests.

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KEYWORDS antisemitism, biography, discourse, ethnography, ethnic categories, history, Jewish orthodoxy, North Africa, postcolonial studies, race, Sephardim, security, urban space, whiteness

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In the late 1950s Sarcelles was one of the first *banlieue* to be built with a post-colonial demographic in mind.[1] A peri-urban town, it is situated sixteen kilometers north of central Paris. It lies northwards of super-diverse Saint-Denis with its significant North African Muslim history and population that formed due to the rebuilding of informal housing settlements as high-rise social housing in the 1960s.[2] Sarcelles is remarkable because, alongside Marseille, it hosts the densest North African Jewish population in Europe. Sarcelles's hugely diverse and predominantly migrant demographic contains a multiplicity of religious traditions, including Coptic, Assyro-Chaldean and multiple other Christian denominations. For over half a century, the high-rise social housing blocks (*grand-ensemble*) of downtown Sarcelles have contained perhaps the highest number of kosher butchers, restaurants and synagogues in France, alongside a significant French North African Muslim population. Sarcelles's Jewish North African community, concentrated in the areas known as Les Flanades and Les Cholettes, constitutes approximately 20 per cent of Sarcelles's total population, while predominantly Maghrebi Muslims constitute 23 per cent.[3]

Since the late 1990s, this intercommunal historical and spatial proximity has been interrupted by an increasingly shrill political distance that is driven by a narrative of enmity between Jews and Muslims.[4] These

1 Catherine Roth, 'Cités neuves pour rescapés de l'histoire', *Patrimoine en Val de France*, no. 10, 2012, 20–3.

2 See Karima Dirèche-Slimani, 'Histoire de l'émigration kabyle en France au XXe siècle: réalités culturelles et réappropriations identitaires', doctoral thesis, University of Provence Aix-Marseille I, 1992, 10; Françoise Soulignac, *La Banlieue parisienne: cent cinquante ans de transformations* (Paris: Documentation française 1993); and Hervé Vieillard-Baron, 'De l'exil aux logiques d'enracinement: l'exemple de Sarcelles', in Gilles Ferréol and Michel Autès (eds), *Intégration et exclusion dans la société française contemporaine* (Lille: Presses universitaire du Septentrion 1992), 105–28.

3 For these figures see Erik H. Cohen and Maurice Ifergan, *Heureux comme juifs en France? Étude sociologique* (Jerusalem: Éditions Elkana/Akadem 2007), 225; Rahsaan Maxwell, *Ethnic Minority Migrants in Britain and France: Integration Trade-Offs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012), 168; and, for more recent corroboration of these numbers, see also Nonna Mayer and Vincent Tiberj, who give similar statistical data on population percentages in their 'Jews and Muslims in Sarcelles: face to face or side by side?', in Samuel Sami Everett and Ben Gidley (eds), *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion Volume 13: Jews and Muslims in Europe: Between Discourse and Experience* (Leiden: Brill 2022), 183–208.

4 See Maud S. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2014); Brice Teinturier and Etienne Mercier, 'perceptions et attentes de la population juive: le rapport à l'autre et aux minorités', *Ipsos*, 31

differences were, however, not accompanied by any open or physical conflict in Sarcelles,[5] an absence noted and discussed by both policymakers and social scientists. However, this non-violent coexistence in Sarcelles changed in July 2014. At the height of the Israeli Defence Force operation 'Protective Edge' in Gaza, and despite the Parisian municipality's banning of pro-Palestinian demonstrations, hundreds of young men from neighbouring areas marched from the Garges-Sarcelles railway station to Avenue Paul Valéry in downtown Sarcelles, site of *la grande syna*' (Sarcelles's largest synagogue), shouting anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian slogans. Before they reached the synagogue, there was a standoff between the marchers and anti-riot police, behind whom stood groups of young men from the local Jewish community, or *la communauté*. Waste containers were burnt, and smoke plumed into the afternoon sky; several arrests were made. Although nobody was hurt that day, Sarcelles became the physical and symbolic crucible of violent conflict, pitting Jewish and Muslim men of primarily North African descent against one another.

The construction of Jewish identification along the lines of race and religion

Using a hybrid methodology, in this paper I bring together ethnography with discourse and genealogical analyses, in order to look at changes in the urban landscape of Sarcelles, the intellectual biographies of local public figures, and prominent public legal contests. Employing the lens of postcolonial studies as it relates to the racialization of former French colonial subjects and their descendants in France, I problematize labels—both self-ascribed and externally imposed—that have been used to describe Sarcelles and its residents over its relatively brief urban history. By employing the notion of de-racialization specifically, this article reaches into the more general orientations of the special issue, enabling a deeper understanding of how processes of decolonization develop in the metropole. Processes of decolonization and (de)racialization continue to pattern the present epoch across generations. I point out that ongoing configurations of social mobility, if diverse across Jewish and Muslim post-migration urban populations, intersect with and refract back these processes. The French colonial paradigm and its relationship to antisemitism is central to postcolonial racialization theory, as Bell has pointed out.[6] However, there is little in the way of a contemporary precedent for discussing race in relation to North African Jewish groups in

January 2016, available at www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/complement-perceptions-et-attentes-de-la-population-juive-le-rapport-lautre-et-aux-minorites (viewed 9 September 2023).

5 Michel Wieviorka, *La Tentation antisémite: haine des juifs dans la France d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont 2005), 387–406 (387).

6 Dorian Bell, *Globalizing Race: Antisemitism and Empire in French and European Culture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 2018).

France. Specifically, within the French case, race talk is not prohibited, but race, even as a social construct, is conceptually denied in the public sphere. The general problem of racism is, however, neither unknown nor undiscussed. By corollary, the relationship between race and religion is complicated by the absence of a public discursive existence, which means that intellectual analysis relies on ellipsis or informal talk.

While the philosophical ethos of postcolonial Republican France officially considers all French citizens equal regardless of their ethnicity or religion, North African Jewish children born in France belong to a population that was, in fact, treated by the immediate postcolonial state as proximate to black or Arab populations. As a result of personal and collective experiences with exclusion and marginalization, many members of North African Jewish communities in areas like Sarcelles learned to think of themselves as not-quite-French. Yet North African Jewish populations in Les Flanades and Les Cholettes have, over the decades, come to be considered as and come to consider themselves as de-racialized, often in opposition to North African Muslims—albeit not without what Eric L. Goldstein describes as associated 'emotional costs'.[7] Yet an intergenerational increase in Jewish religiosity, or orthodoxy, and being or feeling *nord af'* (short for North African) or, to a lesser extent, *séf* (short for Sephardic)—notably through Arabic cultural and para-liturgical production and reproduction—indicates that this process is complex and non-linear. The process of de-racialization in Sarcelles is incomplete, contested and reversible, often for reasons related to its very emergence, including state categorizations that emerged along with the Fifth Republic and surfaced from the national crises that accompanied the wars for independence, notably in Indochina and, later, in Algeria.[8] Since decolonization, re-appropriated North Africanness and Jewish religiosity have opened anew the questions of privilege and power inherent in racializing labels. Moreover, in the French context, neither Jewish (nor indeed Islamic) orthodoxy nor affirming one's non-European background conform to the state model of (successful) integration. The experiences of Maghrebi Jewish community members, both in terms of their relationship with the state and in terms of lived experiences as minoritized and racialized French citizens, therefore at times parallel those of their Muslim counterparts. Both are categorized through the lenses of ethnicity and religion. The term 'racialization', defined by Omi and Winant as 'the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified social relationship,

7 Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2008), 6.

8 See in particular the work of Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2006); and Todd Shepard, 'Algerian nationalism, Zionism, and French laïcité: a history of ethnoreligious nationalisms and decolonization', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2013, 445–67.

social practice or group'[9], filtered by the postcolonial situation, is an important yet seldom applied lens through which to consider the shifting identifications, and circumstances of North African Jewish populations and their descendants in France. The key racial index in question here is the word 'Arab' (*arabe*) and its colonial underpinnings as Other, barbarous, uncivilized and un-evolved. Being an Arab is also usually paired with a particular religious tradition, that of Islam. De-racialization implies a progressive process of shifting away from being perceived as and indeed embodying Arab-ness. At a vernacular and non-legal level, the lens of racialization intersects with numerous significant variables that can describe this process, such as social mobility, language and urban space, enabling via its deployment an interrogation of power asymmetries relating to both (geo)politics and local concerns.

This article works on two levels: a macro, intellectual-genealogical level and a micro, socio-historical one. The latter is organized into four sections. First, because of the analytical and political complexity of North African Jewish history, I provide a historiographic and discursive context to North African (in particular Algerian) postcolonial racialization. Second, I sketch out Sarcelles's Jewish histories in line with the arrival and departure of different North African groups and the spatial concentration of the Jewish population around *la grande syna'* (inaugurated in 1966) using critical race theory to analyse the three labels applied to the neighbourhood, Bab El-Oued (a suburb of Algiers), *un village méditerranéen* (a Mediterranean village) and *la petite Jérusalem* (little Jerusalem). Third, I return to the macro view of a North African Jewish intellectual genealogy as it relates to a Muslim one, including contemporary questions of anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish racism, the discourse of securitization and its emerging counter-narrative. Finally, I provide a micro-view of contemporary North African Jewish cultural practices amongst Sarcellois (people from Sarcelles) that exist in parallel to the significant uptake of Hasidic Judaism in the neighbourhood and describe the class-imbued reasons that people cite for moving into and out of Sarcelles.

Jews and racialization: a theoretical background

Jewish communities have long dealt with the structural realities of racialization and the discursive difficulties of race as a construct. It was only after the Holocaust that scholars addressed race in relation to Judaism, with the goal of debunking the continuing social acceptability of post-war antisemitism. In the postcolonial era, critical Jewish Studies scholarship, as it pertains to both

9 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge 2014), 111, which draws significantly on British sociologist Michael Banton's pioneering article 'Race as a social category', *Race*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1966, 1–16.

the process of racialization and/or the exploration of postcolonial Jewish life and culture, is strongly centred on experiences in the United States and Israel. Eric L. Goldstein has historicized the discussion of race and Jews by documenting the tensions inherent to Jewishness as a racial category since the late nineteenth century in the United States, a society particularly attentive to the categories of White and Black.[10] Karen Brodkin had previously traced an intergenerational line through her ethnography that points out the intersectional possibilities of black and Jewish anti-racism activism for her parents' generation (in the 1940s), her own racial middle 'as both—white and Jewish', and her sons' situating themselves as generically white.[11] Brodkin and Goldstein note the importance of capitalism in the process of becoming white through the emancipatory journey that whiteness provides (from the ghetto, then from careers that were previously unavailable to Jewish Americans), even as this process is accompanied by Jewish unease with apolitical suburban wealth.[12] In light of Israel's importance to contemporary Jewish identification, Jewish Studies has also reengaged the question (asked by Rodinson in 1967[13]) of whether or not Zionism is a form of settler colonialism.[14]

In the 1950s, US social critic and progenitor of Black Studies, James Baldwin, noted the similarities between black struggles in the US and Arab struggles in France.[15] Algerian Muslims in Paris were subject to severe police brutality amid growing Algerian resistance to French colonial occupation. In this context, Baldwin realized that race was not necessarily and not only a question of skin tone or phenotype and that individuals, when being read as Arabs, were assigned a status that corresponded to that of African Americans in the United States.[16] Grappling with global racial injustice at the inception of the Civil Rights Movement, Baldwin found that Algerian Arab and US African American experiences of structural oppression were deliberately dissociated and regionalized, a process that drove a wedge between their often similar quotidian struggles. Thus, Baldwin came to understand how categorizations and separation work as mechanisms of imperial power.[17] Nadjari argues that such power was wielded in the Crémieux Decree of 1870, through which Jewish populations in Algeria's

10 Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 2.

11 Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 1998), 3.

12 Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*, 10.

13 Maxime Rodinson, 'Israël, fait colonial?', *Les Temps modernes*, vol. 22, no. 253 bis, 1967, 17–88.

14 Derek J. Penslar, 'Is Zionism a colonial movement?', in Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff and Maud S. Mandel, *Colonialism and the Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2017), 275–300.

15 James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Dial Press 1972), 34.

16 Ibid., 31.

17 Ibid., 34.

northern territories became French citizens.[18] In parallel to the specificities of imperial thinking around Berber North African status, the decree served the purpose of creating separate regimes of citizenship for those who were defined as Arab Muslims (*indigènes* in colonial terminology) and Arab Jews (*israélites*) who would become French. Though no fixed point in time is absolute and many Jews opposed the decree as a means of state regulation of Algerian Jewish communities en masse,[19] the fact that all Jews residing in the northern territories of Algeria had been 'made French' (*fait français*, in Benjamin Stora's formula[20]) was a significant factor in the long and uneven process of North African Jewish de-racialization.

It is important to situate the Crémieux Decree historically in a period of French Orientalist and therefore racialized antisemitic thinking, in particular around the emergence of the category of 'religion' as a contemporaneous calque for Christianity. If Christianity was the model for the category of 'religion', this was in part because it was believed that Judaism and Islam did not have the attendant refinement or capacity for self-critical reflection that was inherent to the Christian tradition. Gil Anidjar, drawing on Edward Said's critical theory, has demonstrated how Ernest Renan, in his late nineteenth-century philological writings, associated Latin script and Indo-European languages with progress. Renan considered those scripts to be innately attuned to the rationality of historical analysis.[21] To Renan, 'dead' languages such as Hebrew or Arabic only allowed readers and speakers to reiterate dogmatic ideas from texts imbued with religious tradition.[22] These connections between the emergence of organized religion and its attendant racialized dynamics reveal two phenomena: the deeply perceived ties between language and blood in France (and in Europe in general); and the perceived similarities between those who follow Jewish and Islamic laws of conduct, respectively.

Prior to the bloodshed during the Algerian War of Independence that almost entirely ended a millennial Jewish presence in Algeria, the separation between Jews and Muslims, while structurally clear in terms of citizenship and education, was less clear in practice. The notion of the Arab Jew—located between indigenous 'barbarity' and European 'civilization'—was experientially elaborated by the Tunisian Jewish writer Albert Memmi in

18 David Nadjari, 'L'Émancipation à "marche force": les juifs d'Algérie et le décret Crémieux', *Labyrinthe*, no. 28, 2007, 77–89.

19 On this point, see, in particular, Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2010).

20 See, for example, Benjamin Stora, 'Question identitaire et occultation des minorités au Maghreb', paper presented at the 'Colloque international Méditerranée Sud, le retour du cosmopolitisme?', National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco (BNRM), Rabat, 8–10 June 2011.

21 Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2008).

22 Ernest Renan, *Histoire générale des langues sémitiques* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy 1878), 18.

his earliest literary work.[23] Around the same time, the foremost thinker of colonial-racial alienation, Frantz Fanon, along with his Algerian Jewish colleagues, Jacques Azoulay and Alice Cherki, at Blida hospital in Algeria, recognized the 'French assimilationist model' in their therapy.[24] This period came to shape Fanon's view on colonial alienation. Within this context, economically underprivileged and racially discriminated against Algerian Jews contributed to the reproduction of Muslim alienation. Fanon saw a form of (psychological) projection by the 'urban Jewish tradesman' willing 'to identify himself with those who humiliate him to humiliate [the Algerian Muslim] in return'.[25] Whether conscious of it or not, Maghrebi Jews were neither entirely Arab nor entirely European. They were both or somewhere in between, a position that produced an acute awareness of the discrimination and violence meted out by the French state and its civilizing mission.

Albeit in a context in which race as a social construct is conceptually denied in the public sphere, since Sarkozy's lurch toward lauding the benefits of French empire and the revival of a national conversation about French identity in 2005, substantial critical race work has been produced on ethnicization and community enclaves,[26] imperialism and whiteness,[27] and male Arab bodies in France.[28] Nevertheless, few of these studies have paid attention to the racial position of Jews. US historians Maud Mandel and Ethan Katz have introduced the issue of race in the North African Jewish experience in France, notably in relation to Maghrebi conviviality and the inception of anti-racism initiatives.[29] In his longue durée portrait, Katz shows Jews and Muslims as racially unequal.[30] Yet, he refrains from framing their social histories in terms of racialization, arguing instead that Jews have recourse to a utilitarian 'situational ethnicity' which enables them to be perceived as Jewish, French, North African or a mix in various social situations.[31] Katz's account fails to connect ethnic or racial perceptions with aspects of

23 Albert Memmi, *La Statue de sel* (Paris: Corrêa 1953).

24 Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: portrait* (Paris: Seuil 2000), 103. All translations from the French are, unless otherwise stated, by the author.

25 Frantz Fanon, *Sociologie d'une révolution (L'an V de la Révolution algérienne)* [1959] (Paris: François Maspero 1972), 144.

26 Jean-Loup Amselle, *L'Ethnicisation de la France* (Paris: Nouvelles éditions Lignes 2011); Fabrice Dhume-Sonzogni, *Communautarisme: enquête sur une chimère du nationalisme français* (Paris: Dempolis 2016).

27 Pierre Tevanian, *La Mécanique raciste* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta 2008); Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Ahmed Boubeker, *Le Grand Repli* (Paris: La Découverte 2015).

28 Mehammed Amadeus Mack, *Sexagon: Muslims, France, and the Sexualization of National Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press 2017); Todd Shepard, *Sex, France and Arab Men 1962–1979* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 2017).

29 Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France*; Ethan B. Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2015).

30 Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood*, 19.

31 Ibid., 12.

religious difference,[32] disregarding the purported resurgence in religious orthodoxy among both Jews and Muslims in France.[33] For French Muslims of North African descent, such a religious turn arose from being represented as the 'second generation' of perceived 'backward' indigenous migrants, and as an agential act of rebellion against their parents' desire to assimilate.[34] Authors like Laurence Podselver argue that the resurgence of Jewish orthodoxy occurred in similar circumstances.[35]

The racial liminality of Jews has long been a theme in Jewish Studies scholarship, but it has only rarely been addressed in the contemporary postcolonial French context. Much of the work in the field is subsumed by a more general concern with antisemitism that has in recent years concentrated increasingly and often unreflexively on anti-Jewish Muslim attitudes.[36] In the next section I look at the Jewish histories of Sarcelles through a series of vernacular descriptors in relation to the fraught process of Jewish de-racialization that Fanon identified in French Algeria, a process that traverses the period of arrival and settlement in France. I then show how a Jewish-Arab genealogy and an increase in Jewish orthodoxy further complicate a simple linear movement towards whiteness.

Jewish histories of Sarcelles

At the same time that Fanon was developing his theory of indigenous alienation, the first high-rise social housing of Sarcelles was being built. Les Lochères tower block exemplified this urban development. Between 1956 and 1958, predominantly Muslim and Christian émigrés settled in Les Lochères from Egypt, followed by, between 1958 and 1961, Muslim

32 Anya Topolski, 'The dangerous discourse of the "Judaeo-Christian" myth: masking the race–religion constellation in Europe', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 54, nos 1–2, 2020, 71–90.

33 Nikki R. Keddie, 'The new religious politics: where, when, and why do "fundamentalisms" appear?', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1998, 696–723; Olivier Roy, *L'Islam mondialisé* (Paris: Seuil 2002); Yaacov Loupo, *Métamorphose ultra-orthodoxe chez les juifs du Maroc: comment des séfarades sont devenus ashkénazes* (Paris: L'Harmattan 2006).

34 Samir Amghar, 'Le Salafisme en Europe: la mouvance polymorphe d'une radicalisation', *Politique étrangère*, no. 1, 2006, 65–78; Mayanthi L. Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2014).

35 Laurence Podselver, *Retour au judaïsme? Les loubavitch en France* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2010).

36 Marc Weitzmann, *Hate: The Rising Tide of Antisemitism in France (and What It Means for Us)* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2019); Gunther Jikeli, 'Is religion coming back as a source for antisemitic views?', *Religions*, vol. 11, no. 5, 2020, 255. For a corrective, see Illana Weizman, *Des Blancs comme les autres? Les Juifs, angle mort de l'antiracisme* (Paris: Stock 2022).

workers from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.[37] By 1962, the end of the Algerian War of Independence, Les Lochères housed 1,180 Jewish families. Most of them were Algerian *rapatriés,* i.e. people who were sent to France from Algeria for resettlement purposes even when, as in the case of Jewish Algerians, they had been living in North Africa for millennia. Six years after the Algerian war, another block, Les Flanades, was built,[38] which became another marker for the North African Jewish presence in Sarcelles. Les Lochères and Les Flanades constituted the humble *bas Sarcelles* (lower Sarcelles), which brought together some of North Africa's poorer Jewish urban communities and ensured that they lived on the periphery of Paris, following a French colonial spatial logic of racial segregation. During this period Sarcelles was known as Bab El-Oued[39]—a working-class suburb of Algiers—and struggles for working conditions and better public services coincided among different religious populations from North Africa.

Between 1957 and 1968 the population increased fivefold from 10,237 to 51,803 inhabitants, the vast majority coming from outside of metropolitan France.[40] Following the Arab-Israeli conflicts of 1967 and 1971, Sarcelles's Jewish population doubled, representing a 10 per cent increase in the total population.[41] These Jewish demographic shifts were punctuated by the arrival of a large Turkish population in 1971 and several Syrian-Chaldean Christian Orthodox communities in 1976.[42] Today, in addition to these groups, there is also a large Antillais (French Caribbean) community, representing another 10 per cent of the population, and two other big communities from India (Pondicherry) and Comoros. The term 'communities' applies well to Sarcelles, where each community has its own language, commerce and organized political interactions with the local authorities, at times forming alliances for utilitarian ends. Such mutual understanding is exemplified by the Chaldeans that run the bar near to *la grande syna',* which is kept open during Shabbat and serves drinks on credit to observant members of the local Jewish community.

The self-ascriptive image of Sarcelles as *un village méditerranéen* in the 1970s was thus demographic as well as discursive. By the end of the decade, people from across the Mediterranean Basin were living cheek by jowl in Sarcelles. The presence of Maghrebi Arabs, both Jewish and Muslim,

37 Grégoire Morin and Catherine Roth, 'Textes et images du grand ensemble de Sarcelles 1954–1976', *Les Publications du Patrimoine en Val de France*, no. 10, 2007, iv.

38 Dominique Lefrançois, 'Guide des sources pour l'étude des grands ensembles Garges-lès-Gonesse, Sarcelles, Villiers-le-Bel 1950–1980', *Les Publications du Patrimoine en Val de France*, no. 3, 2005, 9.

39 Roth, 'Cités neuves pour rescapés de l'histoire', 22.

40 Morin and Roth, 'Textes et images du grand ensemble de Sarcelles 1954–1976', v.

41 Hervé Vieillard-Baron, 'Sarcelles: l'enracinement des diasporas sépharade et chaldéenne', *Espace géographique*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1994, 138–52 (16).

42 Rahsaan Maxwell, *Ethnic Minority Migrants in Britain and France: Integration Trade-Offs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012), 169.

Turks, and Asyro-Chaldeans fortified the presence of a Mediterranean imaginary. The process of North African Jewish settling enabled Jewish practices from North Africa to be recreated in *la grande syna'*. Particular North African regional atmospheres can be experienced across the synagogue's three floors (located on the ground level and the first and second floors) in four separate chambers. Each chamber separately hosts the Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian Judaic and, more recently, Chabad presences, thereby reflecting the different patterns of migration that have marked Sarcelles. Though the ground floor now hosts intra-national congregations for the major holidays, it has been reserved for the Algerian rite since the 1970s, reflecting the first wave of Jewish immigration to Sarcelles.

Un village méditerranéen is the neighbourhood descriptor that is still used by elderly persons in Sarcelles. The Mediterranean image of the town evokes the nostalgia of a Maghrebi heyday and the experience of amicable Jewish-Muslim relations: *On s'est toujours bien entendu, on n'a jamais eu de problèmes ici* ('We always got along well, we've never had any problems here') a middle-aged woman told me outside *la grande syna'* in September 2014. Less North African or Arab and thus less stigmatized, the Mediterranean is a sanitized and therefore depoliticized trope for a somewhat utopian inter-religious past in which North African Judaism integrated North African Arab cultures. However, this image is also imbued with an Orientalist erasure of Arab *qua* Muslim agency and social significance.[43] Apoliticization, or abstraction from the struggles of other North Africans, was part of an ongoing process of discursive Jewish de-racialization that had taken root before migration to France and would become more entrenched in Sarcelles.

Nord af' was a term of self-reference common amongst descendants of Maghrebi Jewish migrants born in France shortly after the North African independences. More recent generations have taken up the term, *Séfarade* (Sephardi) or the abbreviated *Séf'*, a term that has also been used by the broader French (non-Jewish) society over the last decade. According to Bordes-Benayoun, this change in terminology has to do with three factors. First, internally, Sephardic self-ascription is part of 1980s Jewish revivalism and the attendant trend to self-identify with specific (regional) Jewish cultures; second, geopolitically, it relates to the transnational fight for North African Jewish equal rights in Israel; and third, it is a way for North African Jews in France to differentiate themselves from *les anciens* (predominantly Ashkenazic generations already established in France).[44] Bordes-Benayoun is not concerned with the de-racializing undercurrents of this

43 Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2011), 10.

44 Chantal Bordes-Benayoun, 'Unité et dispersion des choix identitaires des juifs originaires du Maghreb en France contemporaine', in Frédéric Abécassis, Karima Dirèche and Rita Aouad (eds), *La Bienvenue et l'Adieu: migrants juifs et musulmans au Maghreb, XVe–XXe siècle. Volume 2: Ruptures et recompositions* (Casablanca: éditions la croisée des chemins 2012), 165–79 (170–1).

discursive shift, away from more geographic precision signified by terms that identify more specifically with regions such as *nord af'*, Maghrébin, Constantinois or Casablancais, *Séf'* operates as a metonymic takeover of these terms and lends North African Jewish identification a Euro-Mediterranean hue that further distances so-called Sephardic Jews from Maghrebi Muslims.[45]

One generation after 1961, when Jewish arrivals from Algeria peaked, social mobility meant significant Jewish outflow among families from across North Africa who had long lived in Sarcelles to more affluent neighbourhoods nearby but further from Paris, as well as those located more centrally, towards Paris. At the same time, the law of 10 July 1965 partially privatized the French social housing sector, allowing more modest families to take advantage of private housing quotas and to move closer to *la grande syna'*. This change increased the sense of community- or village-ness in the neighbourhood. In line with this dual demographic movement of departure and concentration, Annie Benveniste argues that during the 1980s, North African Judaism in Sarcelles shifted from a grounded *traditionalisme* to greater orthodoxy.[46] New generations, after a period away studying and working in Paris, returned to their hometown Sarcelles with more orthopraxic forms of religiosity. Sarcelles was seen as a place to observe Judaism more deeply and 'better', enabling a form of *teshuvah* or return to Judaism.[47] These original inhabitant returnees later mixed with arrivals from Morocco in the early 1970s, some of whom had moved from Israel to France in search of employment opportunities during the economic slump.[48] 'A space like Sarcelles', writes Benveniste, 'with its Jewish schools, its commerce, its networks, its closed sites of sociability identified by internal passageways known to the community, is reinvested as a site of mystical and messianic utopia'.[49]

In light of its association with *teshuvah* since the 1990s, Sarcelles is increasingly referred to as *la petite Jérusalem* internally, but this image of 'Jewish Sarcelles' has also been reinforced from the outside. By the late 1990s, Sarcelles had taken on a primarily Jewish image. The process of a socio-demographic shift towards a more outwardly religious identification interrupted the Maghrebi Jewish plurality of *la grande syna'*.[50] Nevertheless, *la grande syna'* remains exceptional in the French Jewish landscape because Chabad coexists with

45 This is what Ella Shohat argues vis-à-vis the usage of the term more broadly in *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2006), 213.

46 Annie Benveniste, *Figures politiques de l'identité juive à Sarcelles* (Paris: L'Harmattan 2002), 9.

47 See Samuel Sami Everett, 'From *Les Petites Jérusalems* to Jerusalem: North African postcolonial racialization and orthodoxy', *AJS Review*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2022, 113–30.

48 Vieillard-Baron, 'Sarcelles', 139.

49 Benveniste, *Figures politiques de l'identité juive à sarcelles*, 71.

50 Laurence Podselver, 'De la périphérie au centre: Sarcelles ville juive', in Chantal Bordes-Benayoun (ed.), *Les Juifs et la Ville* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail 2000), 81.

North African traditions, which is unusual. The Chabad community, also known as the Lubavitcher movement, constructed a central chamber on the second floor of the synagogue which outsized the other chambers except for the central (Algerian) one on the ground floor. The Chabad community also came to use the majority of the study rooms on each floor. The appeal of Chabad has increased considerably in North African Jewish circles.[51] Podselver claims that this relates to the space for a specifically Jewish integration that Chabad has offered to North African Jewish descendants from the 1980s onward.[52] Chabad, in its intergenerational pull, speaks to the attraction of global Judaism and is connected to a strong desire for people to distinguish themselves from a singular culture, i.e. French (*la culture unique*). This religiosity became politically significant and further reinforced a process of intracommunal de-racialization. Yet as Sarcelles-born generations moved towards an Eastern European orthodoxy and therefore away from their cultural and liturgical field of North African Judaism, the external markers of orthodoxy became racialized in secular France. Such a perspective takes multiple forms, but these are often ascriptive and exogenous to the synagogue communities themselves. Anthropologist Annick Vollebergh offers an oblique perspective in her ethnography of Belgium *allochtoon* (Dutch for non-native) civil society initiatives to try and make contact with Hasidic and Moroccan Muslim groups in the two poorer neighbourhoods of Antwerp. She argues that those initiating such intercommunal space become disappointed by their perceived lack of uptake by minoritized orthodox Jewish and Moroccan Muslim populations, thus reinforcing a sense of stark communal differentiation.[53] While the civic and demographic picture is very different in Sarcelles, the idea that Jewish orthodoxy necessarily engenders less social and local intercommunal togetherness can reinforce culturalist and racializing tropes of essential difference.

The process of racialization or re-racialization in tandem with movement to certain forms of Hasidism often draws on age-old antisemitic tropes of Jewish essence, thereby erasing differences across Jewish populations and traditions.[54] Despite the intergenerational tensions that it may have caused among a traditionalist North African generation, Chabad has been key to successful Jewish group mobilization for political concessions. This relates to matters such as planning permissions and use of public space (notably for prayer) during the 1990s.[55] In more recent years, Chabad has lobbied for greater securitization and has demanded to use private security for community protection. These efforts won the community concessions from then-mayor of Sarcelles, François Pupponi. The ethos of Chabad drives a

51 Ibid., 50.

52 Ibid., 40.

53 Anick Vollebergh, 'The other neighbour paradox: fantasies and frustrations of "living together" in Antwerp', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2016, 129–49.

54 Everett, 'From *Les Petites Jérusalems* to Jerusalem'.

55 Maxwell, *Ethnic Minority Migrants in Britain and France*, 2012.

motivational thrust for a specifically Jewish activism and gives Chabad a central role as a guarantor of the community. However, this Jewish political mobilization is often bound up with a neorealist worldview driven by fear and the experience of war in Israel, intrinsic to the logic of securitization. In this sense, orthodoxy in Sarcelles, whilst being close to North African traditionalism, is also at the forefront of a shift away from a North African solidarity with other local communities, including Maghrebi Muslims. Sarcelles's orthodox currents are at once empathetic to the structural discrimination of minorities whilst steering towards a secessionist discourse of securitization, which sees the threat as coming specifically from Islamic militancy. Again, this discursive shift is not a linear move towards whiteness, since it draws on an externally racialized categorization of orthodox Jewry that exists ambiguously alongside of an (increasingly latent) North African cultural background.

Jewish-Muslim intellectual genealogies

The political relationship between Critical Race Studies and Jewish Studies highlights the inextricable link between power relations and the neoliberal logic of securitization. Mizrahi (North African and Middle Eastern Israeli Jews') activism for rights and recognition in Israel relate directly to race and racism. Scholars such as Ella Shohat,[56] and Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir,[57] have positioned Jewish Israeli Arabness in solidarity with Palestinians who have been denied their rights and the silencing of their historical experience. However, Sami Shalom Chetrit, whose research shows a global Mizrahi turn to orthodoxy onto which we can also perhaps map a Hasidic and, in particular, Chabad presence in Sarcelles, argues that for Mizrahi Jews in Israel, orthodoxy offered a route to integration and political concessions.[58] Due to differences in historical contexts and Maghrebi Jewish patterns of migration, this process does not apply to France. However, a similar process concerning the de-racialization of the self has seen North African Jewish intellectuals become steeped in an ethnocentric national project.

For example, many Maghrebi Jewish intellectual circles in Paris have shifted away from identification with North Africa towards Israel, though not necessarily in accordance with a renewal of religiosity. The work of the sociologist and former Parisian Jewish community intellectual Shmuel Trigano is a clear example of this process. Trigano and I discussed his

56 Ella Shohat, 'Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the standpoint of its Jewish victims', *Social Text*, nos 19/20, 1988, 1–35.

57 Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002).

58 Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (London: Routledge 2009).

trajectory almost a decade ago in an art deco café near La Sorbonne. There I learned that he had participated in Mizrahi civil-rights activism in Israel during the 1970s, which included a contingent critique of structural racism. However, since the 1990s he has underlined the importance of Jewish civilization as a bedrock of French citizenship.[59] Trigano's intellectual evolution highlights a move towards a hermetic discourse bound to a Eurabian rhetorical project and the importance of Jewish nationalism.[60] More recently, Trigano has gone from being an academic sociologist and public intellectual of Jews and Judaism in France to becoming the founder and spokesperson of an inter-state Franco-Israeli organization that promotes aliyah and the integration of French Jews in Israel.

Trigano's thinking permeates the sphere of French scholarship pertaining to antisemitism, at times uncritically identifying a 'new' and wholly Islamic antisemitism.[61] Scholarly responses to this literature have queried the methods for generating and gathering information relating to 'new' antisemitic attacks on Jewish people in France. For example, the figures underlaying these arguments have at times been skewed towards a perspective that unnecessarily highlights specifically Muslim anti-Jewish feeling.[62] An example of this appears in the SPCJ (Service de protection de la communauté juive, a community body established in 1980 which began yearly reports from 2002 and was long led by the former police commissioner, Sammy Ghozlan) 2013 report.[63] The notes section indicates that Muslim aggression is key to understanding violence and racism towards Jews. The report states that there is no correlation between Israeli state violence against the Palestinian territories and anti-Jewish sentiments in France. This is a remarkable view given that such a causality has been argued by the highly credible CNCDH (Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme) report since 2000.[64] The SPCJ report appears to be an attempt to minimize the thorny political issue of anti-Zionism, and to conflate anti-Jewish acts with a generalizable and irrational Muslim hatred of Jews. As a result, the report depicts Muslim Judeophobia as becoming a constant threat rather than as an issue of periodic concern.

59 Shmuel Trigano (ed.), *La Civilisation du judaïsme: de l'exil à la diaspora* (Paris: Éditions de l'Éclat 2012).

60 Shmuel Trigano, *La Nouvelle Idéologie dominante: le post-modernisme* (Paris: Hermann 2012).

61 Günther Jikeli, *European Muslim Antisemitism: Why Young Urban Males Say They Don't Like Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2015).

62 Paul A. Silverstein, *Postcolonial France: Race, Islam, and the Future of the Republic* (London: Pluto Press 2018), 64.

63 SPCJ, '2013: Rapport sur l'antisémitisme en France', 2014, available at www.antisemitisme.fr/dl/2013-FR.pdf (viewed 2 November 2023).

64 CNCDH, *La Lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie: année 2016* (Paris: La Documentation française 2017) available at www.cncdh.fr/sites/default/files/2021-04/Rapport%20racisme%202016.pdf (viewed 2 November 2023).

The elision of antisemitism and anti-Zionism by the SPCJ is fed by instances like the rioting along the Avenue Paul Valéry on 20 July 2014, not so much in terms of the events themselves, which translate the tensions of Israel-Palestine into the French context, but rather in terms of their depiction by the media and the lasting impression that they leave. Journalists covering the rioting described it in highly evocative terms, such as referring to the riots as 'pogroms'.[65] In Sarcelles, the SPCJ argument of permanent Muslim danger is part of a narrative that increasingly accepts a broad-based perceived 'Islamic' hatred of Jews, known among young Jews in Sarcelles as 'anti-Semitism 2.0'. This is a recently imported form of antisemitism from the Arab-speaking world. Intellectuals turned polemicists such as Georges Bensoussan have sought to reinforce this idea through the image that North African Muslim mothers breast-feed their children the milk of antisemitism.[66] Such French intra-Jewish racializing politics concerning Muslims [67] feed into a wider European discourse that alien Muslim bodies require (bio)-political management. In this way, what Sarah Bracke and Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar have termed a contemporary 'Muslim question' has come to resemble an historical 'Jewish question'.[68]

North African Judaism in Sarcelles today: class, place, culture and religion

The supposedly ahistorical Muslim enmity towards Jews[69] which has become part of a 'Muslim question', i.e. problematizing European Muslim presence, has also been met with a counter-narrative. This counter-narrative attends to an idealized shared mode of Maghrebi conviviality as a site of

65 See, for example, 'Emeutes à Sarcelles: "C'est tout simplement de l'antisémitisme", s'indigne Valls', *Le Parisien* (online), 21 July 2014, available at www.leparisien.fr/val-d-oise-95/sarcelles-95200/emeutes-a-sarcelles-raffarin-et-ciotti-appellent-au-rassemblement-republicain-21-07-2014-4016771.php (viewed 2 November 2023).

66 On Bensoussan's statement, see Samuel Sami Everett, '*La Haine*: intercommunal hate in Paris', *AJS Perspectives*, Spring 2020, available at www.associationforjewishstudies.org/publications-research/ajs-perspectives/the-hate-issue/la-haine-intercommunal-hate-in-paris (viewed 2 November 2023).

67 See Kimberly A. Arkin, 'Defining France and defending Israel: romantic nationalism and the paradoxes of French Jewish belonging', in Zvi Jonathan Kaplan and Nadia Malinovich (eds), *The Jews of Modern France: Images and Identities* (Leiden: Brill 2016), 323–49.

68 Sarah Bracke and Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar, 'Thinking Europe's "Muslim Question": on Trojan Horses and the problematization of Muslims', *Critical Research on Religion*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2022, 200–20.

69 See Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *Antisémitisme et Islamophobie: une histoire croisée* (Paris: Amsterdam éditions 2021). It should be noted that the vernacularized 'new antisemitism' narrative has as its corollary a Jewish youth anti-Arab (Muslim) racism as demonstrated in Kimberly A. Arkin, *Rhinestones, Religion, and the Republic: Fashioning Jewishness in France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2014).

social struggle. Maître Arié Alimi, a lawyer who belongs to the Paris Bar, is well known for defending two young men alleged to have been involved in the rioting of 14 July 2014 in downtown Sarcelles. Following his involvement in the case, Alimi was intimidated by people within the community of his boyhood Sarcelles.[70] The young men whom Alimi defended had initially been convicted for 'violence of an antisemitic nature', a charge which he was able to overturn. According to maître Alimi, the young men were guilty of having borne witness to the disorder but were not guilty of having committed offences of an antisemitic nature. Rather, they had been accused by a group of police officers of having aimed two projectiles (glass bottles) at the officers that smashed less than a metre from where the officers were standing. There had been an elision of the accusation with an implication by association of the young men who were bystanders. Alimi, of Algerian descent, born and raised in Sarcelles, attended the Beth Habad school (Lubavitcher) in the 1980s. To paraphrase him, he defended these young men to uphold the values of Republican equality that he feels have changed in France, disabling the kind of solidarities between Muslims and Jews that he experienced as a child.[71] He defended the young men despite what he describes as the 'cataclysmic sight of events which *may* call to mind pogroms in eastern Europe'. While he never thought that his defence would receive so much attention, he understands his situation to be unique. He is able to provoke a political reaction within the Jewish community (at least in Sarcelles) and across the entire country. This way, he helps to deal dialogically with the hatred and rage born of social misery and political disenfranchisement in the suburban periphery, sentiments that are today often indexed against the strict observance of Islam and growing 'radicalization'. By representing these young men, Alimi also aimed to expose the ways in which Islamophobia works, namely via the merging of 'the Muslim' and 'the terrorist' on the one hand and 'the anti-Zionist' and 'the antisemite' on the other.[72] Alimi's work draws the image of *un village mediterranéen* away from an idealized space of shared modes of conviviality towards an intersectional *nord af'* space of social struggle. The discourse of Muslim enmity against which he acts, bolstered by the French state's spending on counterterrorism,[73] plays out in Sarcelles like Fanon's trope of the Algerian Jewish urban tradesman. The racial-colonial constructs of 'fanatical Jew' and 'violent Muslim' are internalized through the exertion of a powerful

70 Arié Alimi, 'Combattre le racisme d'etat' (blog), 17 August 2016, available on the *Mediapart* website at https://blogs.mediapart.fr/arie-alimi/blog/170816/combattre-le-racisme-detat (viewed 4 November 2022.

71 Fieldwork interviews with Arié Alimi, October 2015, September 2019 and May 2022.

72 Zia-Ebrahimi, *Antisémitisme et Islamophobie.*

73 James Renton and Ben Gidley, 'Introduction: the shared story of Europe's ideas of the Muslim and the Jew—a diachronic framework', in James Renton and Ben Gidley (eds), *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe: A Shared Story?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017), 1–21.

discursive pressure that permeates sacred spaces such as *la grande syna'*, making younger Jewish people in Sarcelles more likely perhaps than their elders to voice anti-Muslim views against their North African 'Arab' Muslim neighbours.

The narrative of securitization in Sarcelles can be seen most prominently in *la grande syna'* that Alimi attended growing up. Upon entering, a large poster displays a list of instructions explaining what to do should one come under racist attack: actions to take, an emergency telephone number to call and key phrases that need to be uttered to the police, the latter of which are highlighted in bold. The telephone number connects directly to that of the local police station via the SPCJ hotline, the work of which feeds into the Bureau nationale de vigilance contre l'antisémitisme. In perhaps the most complete research project on antisemitism in France today, the author of a chapter called 'Pourquoi ça n'a pas peté à Sarcelles?' ('Why things have never got really bad in Sarcelles') explains the interpenetration of private security firms and public policing in Sarcelles due to connections between the local religious community and local government.[74] For example, Jewish community organizations in Sarcelles guarantee that 'public space is not penetrated by pro-Palestinian themes', namely tracts and flyers.[75] Michel Wieviorka's study posited that the town's multicultural 'community' model enabled strong links between the various communities and local government and police.[76] For the Jewish community, this was a process that came to prominence during the 1980s, at the time of Jewish revival.

The—at least in France—paradoxical proximity of a religious community to supposedly strictly secular French local authorities contains an intra-communal class dynamic. Born in Casablanca, my long-time conversational partner Hannah Abitbol migrated to Sarcelles with her family as a child in the early 1980s. She speaks from a position of relative affluence, owning property in Sarcelles. Along with several friends, Hannah recounted the stories of departure from Sarcelles during the 1990s and early 2000s, in particular. The main reason for departure in the 1990s, they told me, was *l'arrivée des religieux* ('the arrival of the orthodox ones') and the intercommunal breakdown that followed the end of the intensive period of Jewish political activism in the 1980s. In other words, a more normative community catering ortho-praxically for all stages of life emerged in Sarcelles at that time. The arguments that her friends would use for moving to more affluent, *moins ethnique* (less ethnic) urban centres, with which Hannah herself often agreed, were thus broadly secularist. But these reasons also translate the influence of social mobility on the process of de-racialization, specifically how this is articulated in relation to both less wealthy North African Jews who made

74 Wieviorka, *La Tentation antisémite*, 404.
75 Ibid., 405.
76 Ibid.

teshuvah and joined the Lubavitcher chamber in *la grande syna'*, and North African Muslim minority groups (also called the 'ethnic' component, *la composante éthnique*). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, such class-inflected narratives began to dovetail with questions of physical danger. Nevertheless, Hannah's friends and relatives often return to Sarcelles during holiday periods, citing *le folklore* (their codeword for the fun of family ritual) as a motive.

In terms of ritual, according to some of the older Jewish émigrés from Morocco and Tunisia with whom I spoke in *la grande syna'*, the precise divisions between North African practice for which the synagogue was originally built, or at least to which it lent itself well, no longer resonate directly with members of generations born and raised in France. This change upset these elderly men, many of whom self-identify as *traditionalistes*. However, their frustration is tempered by the unity of Jewishness in France, constructed in opposition to the perceived global and equally orthopraxic Islamic identification of French Muslims, often of North African descent. This at times imaginary tension between Muslims and Jews augmented by media representations of warring communities[77] percolates down to create a discourse around securitization.[78] Yet the plurality and intergenerational traditionalist/orthodox complexity of *la grande syna'* does not align with this somewhat simplistic representation of Jews and Muslims as constantly at odds with one another.

Penetrating beyond the reception area of *la grande syna'*, a stairwell to the left leads to two stories. On each floor and during Jewish holidays, diasporic rituals are observed that were previously enacted elsewhere in North Africa, including Algiers, Casablanca and Tunis. For example, on the ground floor during the joyful celebration of Simchat Torah (a holiday celebrated in autumn) people partake in dancing and incantation whilst parading the Torah around the room and sometimes out on to the street. They re-enact a ritual that took place around the villages of southern Algeria wherein the Torah scrolls were literally paraded around the village while Muslim inhabitants often stood by and watched. On the first floor, there is a Tunisian chamber. A larger Moroccan chamber can be found on the second floor, made up predominantly of families who settled in Casablanca before independence. During Simchat Torah celebrations, *boukha* (a Tunisian alcoholic drink) is passed around on the first-floor Tunisian chamber, while people on the second floor drink whisky.

The folklore of these North African Jewish rituals are experiences that are recognized and often appreciated across generations. These rituals do not occur in a vacuum, and French-born descendants of North African Jews'

77 See Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France*.

78 See Dominique Schnapper, Chantal Bordes-Benayoun and Freddy Raphaël, *La Condition juive en France: la tentation de l'entre-soi* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 2009).

speech acts often claim North African (*nord af′*) affiliation as part of socialization with Muslims of North African descent in France. For example, Algerian Jewish descendants in Sarcelles often use the more geographically precise term *algérois* (from Algiers) to self-identify, reinforcing their identification with Maghrebi tradition and place, and thereby distancing themselves from France or Frenchness. The dynamics of *la grande syna′* demonstrate North African differences that are of variable interest to second and third generations. While for some these belong to the past, others are re-introducing certain North African para-liturgical practices to their social calendars. Before independence, in Constantine (east Algeria), Casablanca and other cities, an important way for learning liturgy by younger generations who could not always read Hebrew was through *shilishim* or Shabbat poetry recitals.[79] These incorporated Judeo-Arabic poetry (*piyyutim* and *qas'id*) and *baqqashot* (religious entreaties that are being sung). Between Sukkot and Purim, these practices blended song and impassioned recitation. After Shabbat, they were often accompanied by musical instruments such as Maghrebi *djerbouka* (drums). These evenings have re-emerged, albeit modified and re-interpreted by French-born generations of Jews from Sarcelles.

Socially mobile Sarcellois Jews born in the 1970s and 1980s, many of whom went to the local public Lycée Jean-Jacques Rousseau rather than one of the Jewish schools (a notable intergenerational difference between the 1970–1980s and the 1990s–2000s), moved away from Sarcelles in the 1990s to live both closer to the Parisian centre and further away in wealthier areas like Pierrefitte, Asnières or Courbevoie. Now they come together as *tune*, a*lgérois* or *nord af′* in places such as Saint-Cloud for *soirées orientales* to dance and drink to a mix of Chaâbi, Rai and (often liturgical) Mizrahi Israeli pop. Such ways of identifying through language, music, liturgy and song are surprisingly similar to the way young French Maghrebi Muslim descendants evoke *le bled,* a colloquial term for 'North African homeland', meaning 'country' in Arabic,[80] thus re-appropriating Maghrebi culture and language for themselves.

From Judeo-Arab connectivity to solidarity and back

The lived experiences of North African Jewish persons with discrimination and subjectification in France are embedded in the desire to reappropriate an Arabic para-liturgical culture. Such yearning for Judeo-Arabic connectivity, elucidated by the active continuation of *nord af′* musical engouement at home and in nightclubs, in addition to North African regional self-

79 Joseph Chétrit, 'Les Pratiques poético-musicales juives au Maroc et leurs rapports avec les traditions andalouso-marocaines', *Confluences Méditerranée,* no. 46, 2003, 171–9.

80 Jennifer Bidet and Lauren Wagner, 'Vacances au bled et appartenances diasporiques des descendants d'immigrés algériens et marocains en France', *Tracés*, no. 23, 2012, 113–30.

descriptors such as *algérois*, escape the impositions and non-differentiable global category of 'Jewishness' often latent to contemporary orthodoxy. Sarcelles thus maintains a form of exceptionalism in which Chabad and Maghrebi forms of Jewish observance and cultural identification are not entirely antithetical.

Shared Muslim-Jewish North African solidarity, apparent in the first neighbourhood moniker Bab El-Oued, has since the establishment of Sarcelles been obfuscated by classist and Orientalist intellectual genealogies of *séf'* Mediterranean-ness and ethno-religious perceptions of Jewishness, as in the sobriquet *la petite Jérusalem*. However, North African presence and difference has remained a constant in Sarcellois religious and secular life. Orthodox movements in Sarcelles, simultaneously bound up with the racialized connotations of securitization and the threat of predominantly North African Muslim 'antisemitism 2.0', have an apparently contradictory relationship to a Jewish *nord af'* desire for difference and its potentiality for racial solidarity. Nevertheless, orthodoxy, too, has a relationship to de- and re-racialization. North African Jewish and Muslim experiences alike are increasingly signified in relation to religion, and to increasing numbers of persons who decide to return to religion or make *teshuvah*.

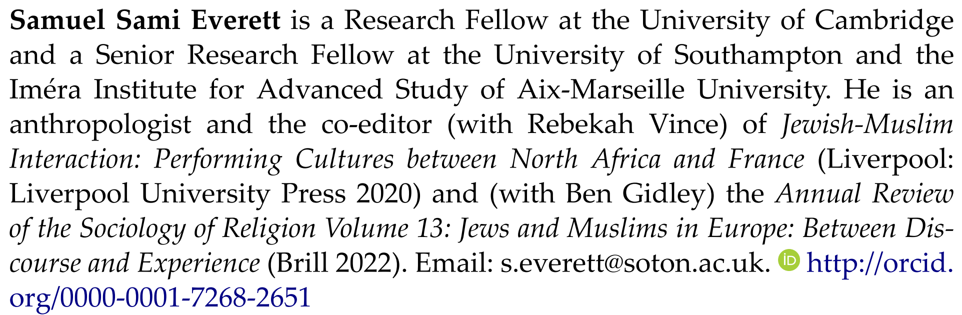
Thinking in terms of racialization about North African Jewish collectives associates trajectories of migration and settling with the security nexus by which minority populations are often organised, i.e. through housing, policing and surveillance. Such an oppositional positionality is anathema to the production of an apolitical and de-racialized default which, while involving 'associated emotional costs',[81] is conducive to a better life offered by social mobility.

Maghrebi alterity, marginalized from the mainstream and practised in places like Sarcelles is expressed, if only irregularly, in an intergenerational frame. People's reticence to embrace this alterity represents precisely the complicating factor of a critical race lens, i.e. its political–analytical duality. For Jews in Sarcelles, recognition of the processes of de- and re-racialization would mean admitting the political potentiality of shared Jewish identification with North Africa, as it translates solidarity with the travails of North African Muslim migrants and their descendants. Consequently, such an admission would touch on broader global struggles against oppression. This is further complicated by an intergenerational religious revivalism marked by an orthodox turn and its alternative logic of integration.

Yet it is not altogether surprising that someone schooled within the Lubavitcher movement and of North African descent, such as Arié Alimi, should be able to position themselves in such a way as to demonstrate that critical empathy and compassion can be derived from an understanding of historical and experiential North African Jewish subjectification. For Alimi and others who hold less public-facing functions, a space of solidarity is situated in a

81 Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 6.

natural overlap between two similar histories of racialized migration to France: Jewish and Muslim. Alimi's actions show how a self-conscious socio-historical analysis of, experience in and engagement with community change can be translated into solidarity.



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