JDC International Centre for Community Development

“My Jewish part: Being a Part of Judaism of Keeping Judaism Apart?”

The transmission of Judaism among children of mixed marriages residing in the Paris metropolitan area.

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Prologue

From Threat to Challenge?

Classic anthropology teaches that every human group creates its own rules concerning marriage and reproduction. These "structures of kinship," to use a term coined by the famous anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, constitute powerful social tools that regulate the way a group ensures its continuity and ultimately sets the boundaries of belonging. Jews are no exception to this. Over time, a series of religious rules came to regulate conversions, membership criteria and Jewish status of the intermarried offspring. Among them, the mandate to in-marry and matrilineal descent as criteria of belonging seem to have become two of the strongest regulations in the religious realm. Yet, biblical sources provide a series of contradictory and ambivalent messages regarding intermarriage, proving that the issue remained in a grey zone for a long time. In fact, the ban on intermarriage seems to have been consolidated during the time of Ezra, around the year 444 BCE. Biblical sources tell us that at the time taking a foreign women as a spouse was a widely extended practice, not only among ordinary people, but also among the highest dignitaries of the Jewish people: "…the hand of the princes and rulers hath been first in this faithlessness" (Ezra 9:2). Appalled by this situation, Ezra prayed, "weeping and casting himself down before the house of G-d," until, so the narration goes, "a very great congregation of men and women" approached him, and, while repentant of their actions, took the radical and dramatic decision of expelling all the non-Jewish women married to Jewish men along with their sons and daughters. "And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra: 'We have broken faith with our G-d, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our G-d to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of HaShem, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our G-d; and let it be done according to the law.'" (Ezra 10: 2-3).[1]

Yet, biblical considerations aside, anthropology holds that in every human group there are usually gaps between social regulations and everyday practice. Today, mixed marriages rank at the top of communal anxieties and are regularly pointed to as one of the major threats to Jewish life in many community surveys. Jewish leaders and religious authorities consider marriage outside the ethno-religious group as a way towards assimilation (it is, in fact, already a manifestation of it) and, therefore, a factor that endangers the continuity of Jewish life as such. In effect, until not so long ago, intermarriage was a way to "leave" the community and to "repudiate" Judaism. Someone who married with a non-Jew was making, so to speak, a strong statement towards his or her relationship with Judaism. However, this strong link between intermarriage and disengagement tend today to be less self-evident. More and more research indicates that intermarriage does not equate to assimilation nor do the children of mixed couples grow uninterested in Judaism.

In the US this community preoccupation has been coupled with the interest of the social sciences regarding this phenomenon, giving place to interesting literature on the subject. Much less has been done in Europe. With the series of studies that JDC International Centre for Community Development (JDC-ICCD) has conducted in France, Germany and The Netherlands, we intend to fill this gap and to make a contribution to this subject. The premises of the studies were the following. Firstly, we were interested in exploring one of the actors that is becoming increasingly important in this issue: the children of mixed couples. Whereas there is already quite a significant bibliography focusing on the

[1] I am grateful to Rabbi Yerahmiel Barylka for pointing out to me these and other passages of the Bible concerning the issue of intermarriage

experiences of intermarried couples, less attention has been paid to this group. Secondly, we strongly believed that one of the most fruitful scientific approaches that we could adopt was to lend an ear to the children of mixed couples and to try to understand their motivations, anxieties and the emotional bond with their identities. Thirdly, it is within the context of their own cities, countries and communities and the particular type of Jewish institutional life developed, among others, where we should try to understand and contextualize their everyday lives. Last but not least, these research endeavors should serve to inform communal practice.

The following pieces of research reflect these premises. They were done by three different local research teams that worked under the close supervision of and in constant dialogue with the JDC-ICCD. Each of the reports, written in different styles and therefore reflecting the reality of each country, represent the final product of a long process of fieldwork and analysis. They can be read as a whole or on a country-by-country basis.

In spite of their local differences, one of the most important common findings of these studies is that they suggest that the road to "assimilation" is not as linear and inevitable as it was thought to be; that the children of mixed couples never quite disconnect from Judaism, much on the contrary, Judaism is widely recognized to be an element of their identity. A second important finding is the capital role that the families and the Jewish institutions play in the formation of a positive Jewish identity among the children of intermarriage. Those who grow up in a Jewish household or who have been affiliated with Jewish institutions tend to develop stronger Jewish identities. Last but not least, far from being a "passive" population, most of the interviewees that want to be connected to Judaism show a very active attitude towards the search for a suitable Jewish environment, one that can assure them both legitimacy and acceptance. Obviously, it must be recognized that things are far from being transparent and clear-cut. As the German report duly emphasizes, the way this population deals with its (Jewish) identity is not so different than the rest of society: it is a highly selective and individual practice, multi-identitarian, in other words, post-modern.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that many of the cases analyzed in these texts lie at the crossroads of two large-scale sociological phenomena with respect to Jewish life during the 20th and 21st centuries; on one hand, growing mass secularization and the integration of Jews in western countries and, on the other hand, the reassessment and recomposition of identity, aiming at "returning to," "reassessing," or "rediscovering" a type of Jewish awareness. If the first phenomenon, which began at the end of the 18th century, implied the emergence of a wide variety of forms of secularization that affected the traditional Jewish identity and led to social integration and assimilation, the second phenomenon is associated with late modernity and has been characterized as a "recomposition in terms of belonging and Jewish identity," not under the traditional forms of intergenerational transmission, but as "individual, selective, multiple and non-exclusive" choices.[2]

This is why we believe that from a communal perspective the issue of mixed-marriages and, especially, that of the children of mixed couples, should be taken with a more thoughtful attitude. In what degree can and should Jewish institutions (congregations, cultural centers, Jewish schools and other Jewish spaces) play a role vis-à-vis this population? How should these instances react when someone with one Jewish parent reclaims for him or herself a Jewish identity?

[2] Régine Azria (2006), "Réidentification communautaire du judaïsme", in Davie, Grace and Danièlle Hervieu –Léger, Identités religieuses en Europe, Paris: La Découverte, pp. 266-267.

In times when the boundaries of Judaism are becoming more and more contested whether from a gender perspective or from a so-called post-denominational perspective; where there are people who declare being "Jews without religion"[3]; when Jewish observance is becoming a more private, individual, and selective, is it not the time to start thinking about mixed marriages and their offspring as a challenge rather than as a threat?

Marcelo Dimentstein

Operations Director JDC International Centre for Community Development

[3] See A Portrait of Jewish Americans. Findings from Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews, October 2013.

Executive summary[1]

1) This study's objective was to put into perspective the various ways by which individuals born to mixed marriages perceive Judaism, the Jewish community, and Israel. Its findings are based on 50 interviews conducted with individuals between the ages of 20 and 40 residing in the Paris metropolitan area[2]. The sundry testimonies bring to light how these individuals have come to grips with their sense of identity and personal history. It also enables us to better grasp the numerous challenges related with the notion of having a "mixed background."

2) Children of mixed marriages do not constitute a monolithic bloc. They entertain a particularly complex relationship with Judaism. The construction of each identity is unique and constantly evolves throughout the course of a lifetime.

3) Most children who received a Jewish education and who attended Jewish institutions decide to maintain ties with Judaism. The nature of these ties largely depends on the way their parent's relationship evolve and particularly on the Jewish parent's views with regard to these important identity questions. The Jewish parent's attitude and position (or even that of the Jewish grandparents) is crucial. If the child receives contradictory or coercive messages, and if he or she entertains a fragile relationship with the Jewish parent, the prospect of transmitting Judaism often diminishes as a result.

4) There exist significant differences between children born to a Jewish mother and those born to a Jewish father. Generally speaking, children born to a Jewish mother find it less difficult to be accepted by the Jewish community given the fact that Jewish law recognizes their status. However, it is interesting to note that interviewees born to a Jewish mother frequently perceive themselves as having a "mixed background" and, in some cases, even do not consider themselves to be Jewish at all. Paradoxically, interviewees born to a Jewish father (i.e. non-Jewish according to Jewish law) seem more willing to assert their Judaism. In this study, we will explore the influence that last names have over identity choices, along with other causes.

5) Most children born to mixed marriages feel the need to observe religious commandments and customs. But their Judaism is often *"à la carte*," that is, Jewish religious or cultural practices are therefore chosen as a function of desire and do not necessarily match traditional practices. Many seek to convert. Yet they often hold negatives views of the *Consistoire*. It is therefore common for them to join Conservative (*Masorti*) or Reform movements, which are putatively more accessible and flexible.

6) A majority of interviewees manifest an interest in Jewish knowledge and in the rich Jewish cultural traditions, but they often discuss the difficulties they face when trying to rekindle with this part of their history, given the fact that it was insufficiently transmitted.

7) In families lacking a strong sense of Jewish identity, remembering the family memory of the Holocaust reflects their willingness to affiliate with Judaism. Yet it does not compensate in any way for a lack of religious and cultural transmission.

8) The important place that the memory of the Holocaust holds does not, paradoxically, prompt a desire to fight contemporary forms of anti-Semitism.

9) Although the problem of anti-Semitism is often downplayed, most interviewees do mention the fact that they have experienced some form of anti-Semitism during childhood or adolescence. Such events play a key role in the development of Jewish consciousness

[1] This summary is entirely based on the work of Julia David, the content of which is available in full below.

[2] A French administrative region officially known as *Ile-de-France*.

and even more so when children experience anti-Semitism within their own family - for instance from their non-Jewish grandparents.

10) Encountering anti-Semitism may have ambivalent effects: it can either strengthen Jewish identity if one takes it as a challenge, or weaken it if one enters into a state of denial. Some interviewees seem to use the fact that they have a mixed background to avoid suffering the full effects of anti-Semitism, especially when their names are not identifiable as Jewish.

11) The relationship that children born from interfaith parents have with Israel matters. It is not, however, a fundamental aspect of their Jewish identity. Although few interviewees question the legitimacy of the State of Israel and some even feel compelled to defend it, a number of them criticize its policies - with varying degrees of passion – while also confessing that they have insufficient knowledge in the matter.

12) Finally, the feeling of being rejected from the Jewish community that children of mixed marriages experience generates harmful ambivalences in the path toward identification with the Jewish world. And the difficulties encountered with "official" representatives of Judaism can come to inhibit any desire to affiliate with it.

"My Jewish part: Being a Part of Judaism or Keeping Judaism Apart?" The transmission of Judaism among children of mixed marriages residing in the Paris metropolitan area.

Julia David

In the Jewish community today, one in three marriages, and one in two marriages among those younger than thirty years old, are "mixed marriages" - generally Christian-Jewish. Here are the commonly held discourses that stand at opposite ends of a spectrum illustrating this increasingly ubiquitous sociological reality: one kind of discourse perceives it as a threatening prospect for the future of the Jewish community and as a source of discomfort for individuals subjected to the diagnosis of psychopathology[1], while the other perceives it as a promising prospect that shall convene a "new man" whose life shall reconcile all kinds of particularisms and who shall signal the end of ancient wars between peoples. Without supporting the tendentious communitarian catastrophism and its tendency to stay apart, nor without promoting *mixophilie*[2], there is a need to pave the way for a reasonable position, which would shed light, not only on the dilemmas that bedevil interfaith couples – there are numerous works dealing with this topic[3] - but on the life courses of children born of such relationships and the way they come to grips with their sense of identity. The latter, indeed, have not yet received the same amount of attention from the social sciences than the former[4]; they are, nevertheless, at the forefront of this emerging configuration, and are holding an increasingly significant share in the future of Judaism - regardless of whether they consider themselves its heirs. Once and if it emerges, those children's willingness to sustain their Jewish identity becomes painfully intense, especially when their father is Jewish - considering that they are not recognized as Jews by the French Jewish consistorial institutions - and are often perceived, much to their dismay, as hurting Jewish history. Beyond the question of the means (and obstacles encountered) by which Judaism is transmitted in these families, noteworthy is the fact that these children are confronted to a cruel question: how to become the guardians of a world that rejects them? They are the gates of the traditional Jewish world, which possesses the oldest legitimacy. In spite of this, some unexpectedly turn this alienated status around and become vigilantes of that world that does not welcome them. Others desperately search for a possible way to "normalize" their status, considering conversion

[1] On this question, see Catherine Grandsard 's summary: "The first North American authors that focused on the psychology of children from Judeo-Christian interfaith marriages, in 1950-60, usually tried to demonstrate that the 'ethno-religious' diversity of the parental couple is likely to weaken the mental balance of these children. Their approach is essentially based on a theory describing the negative effects of interfaith marriages on their children, which became widespread in the psychosocial literature from the late thirties, led by Stonequist Everett (1937). From his field observations, this author defines personality traits specific to subjects at the edge of two or more traditions. According to Stonequist, a person who identifies with two groups with different standards, even incompatible, necessarily experiences the conflict as a personal difficulty that causes acute psychological marginality, characterized by an excess of timidity (self -consciousness) and 'racial susceptibility' (race-consciousness), an intellectual and emotional ambivalence, feelings of inferiority, hypersensitivity, nervousness, irritability, mood instability, lack of confidence and feelings of isolation and lack of 'belonging.' This rather gloomy picture was once notorious – indeed, many authors - sociologists, psychologists, and psychotherapists, referred to it explicitly in their first encounter with children born of interfaith marriages in general and specifically for Judeo-Christian ones (Zanden, 1963 Gordon, 1968; Mann and Waldron, 1977; Blau Becker and Fitzpatrick, 1984. Etc.). Furthermore, the identity template that Erik Erickson has also produced for his research on children born of interfaith marriages, particularly the idea of a 'confusion of roles,' may occur at the adolescence when the subject finds a discrepancy between his own perception of his identity and that which is referred back to him or her from the outside." In Catherine Grandsard in "Psychology and Psychopathology of the Meti Judeo-Christians. Proposal for a scientific approach", in Psychology Francaise no. 46-1, 2001, p.89.97.

[2] We owe this neologism to Pierre-André Taguieff. See, for instance, *La Force du préjugé. Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles*, Paris, La Découverte, 1987. [TN: "Mixophlie" refers here to a pronounced desire to promote interfaith/intercultural relationships]

[3] See the works of Doris Bensimon and Françoise Lautman, and those of Séverine Mathieu or Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun.

[4] The latter have namely been the object of a study done by Belgian psychologists over about 15 students from Brussels (Goldberg et Bok, 1970); see also the works of Catherine Grandsard, *Juifs d'un côté. Portraits de descendants de mariages entre juifs et chrétiens*, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, Seuil, 2005.

or turning to Reform Jewish institutions for a "confirmation" of their Judaism. Still others, weary of knocking on doors that do not open, decide to put an end to this impossible situation of trying to affiliate with the Jewish world: they instead turn to other identities and explore other spiritualties, when they do not end up, even more lonely and trapped into dead ends, cast off, by subjecting their lives to endless wanderings. In any case, none of them have a linear path, devoid of pitfalls - even those who seemingly have a positive rhetoric and a serene attitude. Inheriting two ruptures – that of endogamy made by each parent - children born out of intermarriages often feel compelled to ensure continuity, and sometimes a double continuity; this feeling, we assume, finds its root cause in the "dissident" origins we just described, which bear the accusation of nothing less than that of endangering the survival of the whole Jewish community. For they incarnate all kinds of imaginary transgressions[5], our subjects, in turn, bear imaginary desires of reparation and redemption. Their mission is exhausting and necessarily subjected to severely conflicted narratives.

The findings presented in this study are based on 50 interviews conducted during the course of the year 2013.[6] For methodological reasons, we decided to indiscriminately interview adults born to a Jewish father or mother and then mix up the interviews in order to draw comparisons. We interviewed people between the age of 20 and 40 years old, which promises a better appreciation of the problematic at hand, for it is widely agreed upon that it is during this age-range that major life decisions are made and crystallized - insofar as one's family life and what flows from it is concerned. In order to create a sample, we reached out to Jewish institutions susceptible to know children born of mixed marriages, as well as reform and Conservative (or *Masorti*) Jewish institutions. The conventional method of acquaintanceship, as well as that of "snowball sampling," helped finalize the composition of the panel. Insofar as possible, we maintained a balance between interviewees of Ashkenazi and Sephardic backgrounds, yet our sample did not to be a perfect numerical representation of children born into interfaith families. We drafted a questionnaire in order to provide support for the interviews, but the interviews were informally structured.

Emphasizing contemporary cases, this study aims, on the one hand, to be informative as to the modalities (and difficulties) involved in the transmission of Judaism for the special case of children born of mixed couples and, on the other, to encourage reflection as to the means by which to preserve the Jewish heritage without promoting its essentialism. An analysis of personal life trajectories allows a better understanding of how conflicts of loyalties and tensions between identities are played out, their difficult cohabitation until a choice is made between one of them, and their possible articulation or insoluble confrontation within minds that are continuously unable to settle. This reflection also enables us to account for the contradictions that are at work between the claims to freedom made by the modern subject and the feelings of responsibility (anachronistic at an age when vertical obligations erode?), which still echo among a minority identity with a traumatic history. The investigation finally leads us to ponder the limits of freedom of choice wielded by "Moderns" as a right to define themselves independently of assigned ancestries. Indeed, is a proactive proclamation sufficient to account for the depth and complexity of transmission patterns? Doesn't the theme of "identity choice" left to the sovereign child also render negative unintended effects? As rightly pointed out by the clinician Catherine Grandsard, to whom we owe the category of "Judeo-Christian *Metis*": "saying to a *Metis*: 'Do as you wish, the answer is in you,' is incredibly violent ... Inciting him to believe that it boils down to agency is an illusion."

[5] Didn't the parents disrespect the explicit or implicit law of their clan, but often also worried the line of their spouse, letting at least four serious transgressions of meaning and consequence occur in these symbolic spaces?

[6] Martin Messika (Paris I/ UQAM) and myself conducted the interviews – splitting the work in half.

Difficulties linked to the transmission of Judaism in the context of intermarriages are only understandable in light of the paradoxes that "hyper-contemporary individuals" comprise. Such difficulties encompass changes taking place in a society marked by ancient logics of affiliation. The question at hand is particularly important for the Jewish world and its representatives: how to reconcile the modern desire to "personalize affiliations" (Gauchet) - which is common among children of mixed backgrounds trying to affiliate with the Jewish world - and the historical continuity of Judaism that Jewish institutions are committed to preserving?

I – Identity Building and Affiliation Feelings

Here is a known paradox about modern man: the more he develops a capacity to produce history, the more he forges his autonomy, which, in turn, leads him toward torment, and to have to confront his own intrinsic opacity. From this perspective, what children born to intermarriages experience only deepens divisions that belong to modern man as well as the disturbing questions imposed on him since birth. Although a number of postmodern discourses rationalize such divisions and downplay its contrasts by interpreting them as the legitimate avatars of a changing and polymorphic individual, the institutional religious discourse, however, remains within the framework of unitary thought, faithful to this "jealous god" who does not tolerate, as far as his people are concern, the competition of other religions - even if he includes the complex and pluralistic reality of modern identifications at other levels.

Those interviewed are caught between these two discourses, which offer the possibility of assuming all identities at the same time: the abolition of the non-contradiction principle, and the uncompromising exclusiveness of a Judaism that keeps on believing in the existence of some irreconcilable loyalties or vocations. As they are torn between the limitless promises of modern autonomy and the ancient assurances that belong to an heteronomous tradition, those interviewed make difficult efforts to deal with their contradictions - of which they tend to bear an acute awareness. The people interviewed had different kinds of reactions to deal with these internal struggles, which can be summarized as follows:

- Break all ties with all Jewish affiliations by rejecting the identity of one's parents. Indeed, let us note that none of the people interviewed sought to reject their Jewish identity for the purpose of embracing that of the non-Jewish parent. Such breaks are replaced by a third identity or another "neutral" one. Indeed, interviewees such as Laura, born of an Algerian Jewish father, avoid the dilemma by defining themselves as atheists, hence reducing the Jewish part of their identity to a purely religious essence in order to better free themselves from it. Such breaks can also be asserted as a willingness to get rid of the idea of identity - considered as the source of endless problems for torn subjects - and wanting to remove all forms of cultural or religious affiliation. Guillaume, who was immersed in his father's Jewish world, defined himself as "having one foot in and one foot out," and eventually as being "neither Jewish nor Catholic." If some sociologists consider such insistences to be the product of a desire to exercise a sense of self-belonging in the modern age, they can undoubtedly also generate what Gauchet called "pathologies of inner emptiness" among individuals floating, endlessly drifting, and incapable of establishing both formal and informal bonds.
- To accumulate, juxtapose, and superpose identities, reinforced by the "spirit of time," which allows all cohabitations; this is how Mary, born of a Catholic father and a Jewish mother, considers herself to be at once "Catholic and Jewish": she says, "It is important for me to express the two identities." The same for Fanny, who defines herself as a "Jew

baptized Catholic." Some claim the right to honor several affiliations, being reluctant to the symbolic violence that is at work in every act of decision-making. That is only legitimate if one remembers Marc Bloch's beautiful utterance: "It is a poor heart that for which it is forbidden to contain more than a single tenderness." However, the limit implied in such a proposal arises when subjects do not perceive antagonisms or cultural incompatibilities and settle for forms of denial, wanting to smooth out any unevenness between universes. Enchantments of reconciliation are preferred to historical or doctrinal truths and the work of interpretation. While certain historical conflicts are deemed obsolete, such arrangements necessarily develop within the very superficial approaches of large bodies of tradition that are deliberately biased insofar as the history of Judaism among nations is concerned. "Let's not discuss sensitive topics," could be the motto of these tireless apostles of harmony, which push away any disagreement and tension away from their consciousness.

- To look for a third option, appeal to symbolic resources that comprise both traditions, and produce a new identity through the selection of elements. The subjects thus consolidate their positions by using the connection that exists between worlds. Yet this syncretism is but a flawed move that is meant to hold together fundamentally divergent and sometimes violently conflicted traditions.

- Recognizing one's difficulty to define oneself, rendering indecisiveness one's kingdom and the ultimate station of one's interrogations. For instance, Aurélie, whose father is a Sephardic Jew, planned to convert to Judaism several times, has a relationship with a Jewish man, and wishes to raise their potential kids as Jews; however, she never clarified the mysteries of her own identity: "It is always very difficult for me to position myself," she says. For Deborah, whose father is an Algerian Jew, the choice of identity depends on her "mood" of the day. This young woman is visibly happy to disconcert her surroundings on these issues, and claims the possibility of "not knowing" who she is. This random and intermittent nature when it comes to identity affiliations in the contemporary age appears problematic when one thinks, along with Gauchet, that "by insisting that there be no connection between what I was yesterday, what I am today and what I could be tomorrow, a radical uncertainty as to the continuity and consistency of self emerges."

- To assert oneself as "half-Jewish." Here the subject attempts to "stick" as close as possible to the truth of a cleaved-self by using a quasi-mathematical vocabulary ("fifty- fifty," some say) while *de facto* leaning closer to the Jewish affiliation, for the "non-Jewish" side is implicitly evacuated - rendered secondary by failing to even mention it.

- To assert oneself as Jewish. Although explicitly stating it puts an end to the dilemmas tied to the subject, the path may nevertheless remain difficult and ambivalent. For instance, Jerémy, 28 years old, born of a Jewish Algerian father and Catholic mother, defines himself humorously as "the most Jewish among non-Jews and the least Jewish among Jews." In certain cases, the subject feels Jewish since the time of infancy, but comes to be brutally expelled from his own "self" when confronted to the lack of recognition of the institutional Jewish world or to the prejudice of his community. Anne, whose father is Jewish, illustrates this example: "we were told that we were Jewish and we really believed it." Yet Anne grew disillusioned as she was called a "dirty *goy*" when she was 13 years old by a Jewish friend. Today, she refers to this incident as "very painful" and blames her parents for "not having offered a solution" and for not grasping the "extent of her pain."

Against the case of "unequivocal Jews" - which are eager to have their Judaism recognized either through reform confirmation, or through conversion in the case of children born to a Jewish father, or even by ignoring institutional authorities by choosing to deny

them control over the perception of their identity - we can contrast the chaotic journey of "apprentice Jews" who are altogether slower to discover how irreducible their sense of belonging to the community is. In all cases, the perception of identity remains most often damaged by these exhausting quests for legitimation. Now converted through Conservative (*Masorti*) Judaism, Anne acknowledges that a "little shadow" still looms over her relationship with her Jewish identity. Having a Jewish mother, Caroline defines herself as Jewish if questioned but adds that she is not "one hundred percent convinced" since her father is not Jewish.

When she feels pressured to reveal her parents' cultural background, Anne does not hesitate to simply claim that her Catholic mother is Ashkenazi in order to "cut the discussion short." This anecdote brings to light an interesting phenomenon: for children born of mixed couples, concealing their non-Jewish identity is as challenging as renouncing their affiliation to the Jewish faith and people. This begs the question of whether certain individuals need to conceal parts of their identity in order to feel Jewish; and, by the same token, whether this enables them to find the right personal balance as they seek to accept the intricacies of their identities.

Interviewees vary to a great extent in the way they connect and identify with the Jewish world. Most feel the need to revive their interest in religion, but they often practice a selective kind of Judaism, which severally differs from commonly accepted religious standards. For a minority of them, it is in fact an imaginary kind of Judaism – the subjects in question aimlessly cobbles together knowledge and rituals in order to produce an invented form of Judaism that is in fact closer to fantasy than religious practice.[7] One can assume that such practices nonetheless play a powerful role in that they encourage such individuals to pursue a more coherent and rigorous path toward Judaism.

A number of interviewees considered converting to Judaism. But their portrayal of official Jewish institutions or their direct experience with the *Consistoire* are often extremely negative. Many then decide to settle for a "confirmation" of their Judaism through the Conservative (*Masorti*) or Reform movements, deemed more accessible and less sectarian. The reception is generally considered warm; it is important to note, however, that a significant portion of them fail to complete the entire process, paralyzed by recurring questions making them uncomfortable, and too often having but meager family support. These people in search of a community - or a meta-family - to fight the "annihilating loneliness" (Gauchet) imposed on them by the modern world tend to fall into an extreme form of solitude that even the final acceptance into a community does not end, and this in spite of a rather intense participation in community life. The desire to be included and the pains it brings seems to extend indefinitely in a mechanical fashion. "Alone with others" seems to be the ultimate reality attached to these hard-won affiliations, which were probably acquired at too great a cost for the subjects to find comfort in them.

Most respondents also manifest an interest in the world of study and the wealth of Jewish culture. But again, as observers, the superficiality of these incursions strike us. It is difficult to assess whether this lack of knowledge is related to the initial fact that they came from a mixed background or if this phenomenon is part of a larger crisis of culture that touches Judaism at large - perhaps even society at large. However, it should be noted that, in most cases, the Jewish parent seems hardly more knowledgeable. Children of the next generation are doubly dislocated; from a normative standpoint and given their diversity. However, many, against all odds, make patient efforts to connect in one way or another to their Jewish past. However, such individual desires appear very fragile and poorly equipped in terms of knowledge in order to counter logics of erosion. That which was not

[7] This invented type of Jewish practice is not an example of heterodoxy since to be considered as such it needs to be somewhat connected to an accepted form of orthodoxy, in which it is clearly not the case.

given during childhood and adolescence seems difficult to recover in adulthood. Most interviews illustrate the discomfort of these people of goodwill exhausted to reinvest this part of their history that was insufficiently transmitted.

One could suppose that once confronted with such challenges, the fight against anti-Semitism and the perpetuation of the memory of the Holocaust would function as a compensating element on the path to identification. The interviewees frequently make references to the Holocaust without, however, letting them serve as a placeholder of any kind for religion. But it should be noted:

1 - That they do not necessarily imply historical knowledge. The emotional depth is significant among the interviewees, particularly for those whose families have been affected, yet historical knowledge tends to be poor. Historical knowledge is replaced by a flat impersonal speech.

2 - These recurring references to the Holocaust paradoxically do not seem to prompt a desire to fight or to be alerted by contemporary forms of anti-Semitism. Most interviewees combine a hyperbolic reference to the Holocaust with an indifference or some rationalization of acts of anti-Semitism, even for those, like Irene, who decided to establish a "Jewish home," to be observant, and to consider herself a part of the Jewish people. Things seem strangely dissociated, and we observe here, as in other respects, an extreme segmentation of thought and behavior. The unitary character of various Jewish questions seems to have disappeared.

Regarding the differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews - as these categories can produce utterly different ways to identify to Judaism, we can especially note a greater ambivalence when it comes to children born to mixed marriages of Ashkenazi origin. These families are often more closely tied to the Holocaust, which produced a twofold effect:

1 - The trauma violently renders Judaism a non-negotiable identity while presenting it as dangerous, therefore fostering a desire to be released from it. Suffering simultaneously engages and disengages.

2 - The hypnotic memory of the Holocaust produced in these children a form of magnetization to Jewish memory, and the Jewish world becomes a place that one cannot light-heartedly desert. But these families marked by the Holocaust are also those that saw the transmission principle brutally come to a halt. This leads to the paradox that Finkielkraut pertinently described in his *Le Juif Imaginaire* [A.Finkielkraut 1981], namely a Judaism obsessively focused on misfortune and without substance. However, some children of Sephardic origin whose families were also affected by the Holocaust, by the deportation, or by the legislation of Vichy, oppose their "unrecognized" traumatic memory to the "recognized" Ashkenazy memory we described. If none of the people interviewed use the logic of victimhood competition, we can assume that this lack of visibility produces a kind of reboosting of the trauma that could potentially give a greater share to the Holocaust in their perception of Judaism.

As to whether attachment to Israel constitutes a part of the contemporary Jewish identity, it seems to be the case for few. Some have frequently traveled to Israel since childhood and have family ties there. The question was sometimes contentious in the parental couple and becomes so in their own couple. Some then develop a discourse of solidarity or elaborate balance ideas in response to attacks that seem excessive or unfair. Few of those interviewed question the legitimacy of the state of Israel, yet, to varying degrees, many are critical of its politics. But they also acknowledge the fact that they have insufficient knowledge of the specifics to provide a meaningful analysis. A number of

them insist on the fact that they are first and foremost French citizens in a way reminiscent of nineteenth century *"Israélites*."[8] The question of French national identity, however, does not mobilize them much, and most of them rather feel comfortable in an elastic, as it were, multicultural society. Few of them are chauvinistically French at a domestic level, nor do appeals to republicanism enthrall them - Emilien is one of the very few who truly claims a dual historical loyalty, Jewish and French, and identifies to these two cultures, one Jewish and the other non-Jewish. They seem to resort to their French nationality for the purpose of dissociating themselves from the burdensome Israeli issue. Overall, the global tendency to delegitimize Israel seems to inhibit its voices of defense and empathy. Most interviewees therefore seem willing to distance themselves from a subject that discomforts them within French society.

It is striking to observe that interviewees born to a Jewish mother - deemed fully Jewish by the standards of the Halacha - often feel just as "mixed" and, in some cases, even do not identify themselves as Jews at all. For instance, Caroline, who is 22 years old, had arguments with her mother about this topic during her adolescence and considers herself today to be a "little Jewish" and "a little Catholic" as well. She never mentions her mother's Jewish origins in public and simply prefers to call herself an "atheist" when she is asked. Interestingly, reactions differ among siblings. The oldest sibling born to a woman whose mother was Jewish, himself uncircumcised and not *bar mitzvahed*, does not feel Jewish and lives with a non-Jewish woman, while his two sisters identify themselves as fully Jewish. Marie, 36 years old, also born to a Jewish mother but whose parents got married at Church, received a Catholic education, was baptized Catholic and had her communion. She was conscious during her adolescence that she had "Jewish roots," which is why things remained "fuzzy" in this regard for a while. She now claims to "have been raised Catholic and Jewish also."

Interviewees born to a Jewish father, and therefore not recognized as Jewish by the standards of the Halacha, seem to paradoxically encounter fewer "difficulties" and identify with their Judaism more serenely. The family name they bear and the way they are perceived as Jews by non-Jews no doubt explains their firm adhesion to Judaism (when children born to a Jewish mother decide go "incognito" they hardly become the targets of anti-Semitism). Jewish fathers who are part of intermarriages also seem more eager than Jewish mothers in the same situation to retain identity marks and religious practices - including circumcision and the importance they ascribe to it in the relation of symbolic separation with the original maternal fusion and the identification to the paternal universe. One can also imagine that it empowers fathers to impose their will within the couple in a generation still marked by patriarchalism.

For the most part, the interviewees challenge the Jewish matrilineal principle, whether the Jewish parent is the father or the mother. Two kinds of reactions flow from this contestation: they either distance themselves from their Judaism or, on the contrary, they affirm their Jewish identity in spite of institutional religious standards. It also seems that in a society imbued with enlightenment universalism and the ideology of human rights, the idea of a heteronomous principle of distinction does not make sense, and appears to most as a kind of segregation. Jewish tradition is indeed subjected to very powerful principles of "tolerance." Some nevertheless rest on tradition to mark the prerogative limits of matrilineality.

Finally, let us remember that identity concerns manifest themselves differently throughout one's life. The relation that children born of mixed couples have with their "Jewish part" depends primarily on the way the parents deal with these questions - it

[8] [TN] The term "Israélites" refers to integrated Jews who kept religious customs and practices private in line with the French Republican model of integration. Throughout history and depending on the context, the term has held a variety of connotations.

depends particularly on the Jewish parent. There are numerous cases in which the Jewish parent suddenly "returns" to his or her Jewish roots, and thereby brings the children along in this identity, religious, or cultural reaffirmation process. Adolescence generally conduces one to wrestle with such question regardless of parental attitudes - it is then that greater agency empowers enough to escape familial frameworks: in a number of cases, intimate relationships, friends, or an adult figure charismatic enough so to act as a parental substitute, play a decisive role in affirming one's identity of choice, and on potential future decisions. Illness or death of a parent, grandparent or great-grandparent's funerals, initiates a reflection as to questions of identity - for instance, at the age of 8 years old, at the funeral of her great-grandfather, Sophie sees her father wear a *yarmulke*, and it is the first time as far as she can remember that Judaism made its way into her home. Different relationship choices, dealing with the demands these relationships bring up, or the birth of a child, are events that raise questions yet again about one's Jewish identity and the desire to transmit it. Even if identity problems are endless, even if identity is not an immovable rock but rather a game played out with wobbly and worry, even if identity is as a constant stream, one cannot, however, make of that stream its destiny. Identity also presupposes a point of equilibrium. Children born out of intermarriages must redouble their efforts, it seems, to stop this fragile truth. Because contingency has the power to easily trouble their identity, they have no respite: the delicate arrangement forged as a shield to avoid confusion is always waiting to resume.

II – Analysis of the determining factors in one's affiliation to the Jewish world

Not surprisingly, maintaining a religious framework and access to general Jewish knowledge during childhood seems fundamental. Among men, circumcision seems to be an essential factor. Children born to a Jewish mother who were circumcised and received a Jewish education tend to affiliate themselves with the Jewish world. Clement highlights that point: "There was never a doubt in my mind [...] It's because I was circumcised, it's because I was always told that I am a Jew, and because I went to the Talmud Torah." Those who feel Jewish despite the fact that they were not circumcised tend to experience great pain. For instance, this is a particularly sensitive topic for Martin, who was born of a Jewish mother: "that's something I hide from most people [...] I 'm a bit ashamed. I have to do it, I'll do it," he says. His non-Jewish father opposed it, and Martin says, "It's horrible because, you see, it is a very small detail yet today it is something very important for me [...] I never lie about anything in my life but I lie about that, not to everyone but it happens." Emmanuel, whose mother is an unaffiliated Jew since birth, was baptized Catholic and raised in Catholicism for years and was finally circumcised at 12 years old. "As strange as it may sound," he keeps a positive memory of that experience. His *bar mitzvah* took place a few months later and constituted, he said, "a very important moment ... let us say that it was a moment when I felt closest to institutional Judaism." Most people who now identify themselves as Jewish or have strong ties with the Jewish world and a willingness to transmit their Judaism had, even intermittently and through complicated routes, access to Jewish religious worlds, whether through major rites of passage, or Talmud Torah attendance for boys or synagogue - most often through Jewish Reform movements. They all experienced some kind of religious practice at home - often minimalist - not necessarily respect the Sabbath or kosher rules but celebration of important religious festivals. This kind of religious observance is sometimes *a posteriori* considered poor or incoherent, yet it plays a significant role in the way things unfold in the future. Let us also note that a mechanical and unintellectual kind of Judaism, so long as the latter is not coercive, remains preferable to a total absence of religious references. Jewish grandparent's willingness to transmit Judaism is also important, as they often differ from the Jewish parents. For instance, Anne's testimony reflects a tyrannical but

affectionate encouragement from her grandparents: "they used to tell me all day that I was Jewish and that I was going to marry a Jew," she recalls. In some families completely disconnected from the Jewish world, the willingness to affiliate inevitably goes through the memory of the Holocaust - a number of interviewees know that some of their family members (grandfather or grandmother in general) were exterminated. We should note, however, that as intense as the desire to affiliate may be, they lack knowledge of how to approach the task. For instance, when we asked Marion, whose great-great -grandfather was deported, how she would eventually transmit Judaism to her own kids, she said: "I will tell them that they are Jewish (...) but I have nothing to transmit except for the history of the Holocaust." These people typically invest the ranks of the Reform Jewish Movement of France (MJLF) and wish for their children to join.

Even if the issue of contemporary forms of anti-Semitism is often downplayed, most interviewees paradoxically state that they experienced anti-Semitism during childhood or adolescence. Without yielding to a Sartrean definition of Jewish identity, it is clear that these unfortunate events often play a structuring role in Jewish consciousness. These issues become even more critical when they encounter anti-Semitism within their own family. For instance, one of our interviewees' Catholic grandmother calls Jews "kike" in front of her son-in-law and her granddaughter. We could therefore assume that this category of children born of mixed couples have a more disillusioned and realistic perception than kids born of two Jewish parents who do not experience anti-Semitism from the inside nor with the same ubiquity.

But in most cases, the parent who is not Jewish is neither anti-Semitic nor philo-Semitic and has a rather well-meant neutral stance. Above all, they do not think that the issue of anti-Semitism needs to be taken too seriously. They therefore fail to realize the difficulties their children encounter. "My mother," Emmanuelle says, "married a Jew as she would have married anyone else." However, there are cases in which empathy and knowledge of the Jewish world coming from the non-Jewish parent (or the non-Jewish grandparents) can play a role to facilitate transmission. In such cases, the non-Jewish person does significant work with a highly intellectual approach. The Jewish parent serves as a soft support and is expectedly satisfied with the project.

The importance of the transmission - voluntary or involuntary - of Jewish cultural elements (literature, music, cooking, etc.) seems also crucial. Yet to a lesser extent than straight religious transmission, as the latter's psychological imprint seems particularly powerful. We should, then, establish hierarchies: reading Albert Cohen's during childhood creates a stronger bond with Judaism than reading Sfar's "The Rabbi's Cat" as it allows one to take part in more fruitful Jewish imaginary escapes than the sheer smell of Jewish bread cooked by one's family. Access to global Jewish culture is significant; access to great works that are at once Jewish and universal and are part of a shared heritage, beginning with the Bible and its variations in the literature, painting, etc. However, interviewees claim that this way of affirmation and self-construction is today endangered. Let us note that the socio-cultural environment of the interviewees may have an influence on the ways by which to identify with the Jewish world - access to culture, types of sociability, integrating structures, etc. - it does not seem to have any major impact on affiliation as such. The fact remains that there are more or less safer ways to be Jewish. Even if intellectualization is not a guarantee, and even if plurality is intrinsic to Jewish existence[9], what can Judaism be if is not tied to the "Book"/ books?

Of signal importance is the narrative in which the family conveys the Jewish story and

[9] To that effect the development of secular associations (so few these days) around certain cultural aspects (folklore, cooking, etc.) could allow it to engage a public that Jewish religious dimension hits or does not appeal

the symbols they use, such as when they pick specific Hebrew names or when they name a child after a family member lost during the Holocaust. Returning to Judaism after it was suppressed can be done in an extreme fashion and can come as a shock to parents. Also important is the establishment of ties with Israel at a young age as that can be an entry point into Jewish problems, *a fortiori* in those cases in which the religious element is missing or feeble in the family, or, in some cases, when one enters into an intimate relationship that comes to reinvigorate their desire to belong to the Jewish community.

But in all these cases and beyond the power of each of these elements and of the synergies that occur in the course of their confluence, the attitude held by the Jewish parent (or Jewish grandparents) remains a major determining factor - whatever the attitude of the non-Jewish parent may be.

Our findings could be summarized as such: a) the fact that the Jewish parent lacks involvement with Judaism is not necessarily a factor that permanently cuts off the child from his or her Jewish ancestry - for the Jewish question tends to surface anyway. Yet this resurgence does not translate into a reinvested kind of Judaism, and it can open the door to an infinite and chaotic course if the individual in question does not find institutional support of any kind b) The Jewish parent's efforts to transmit Judaism, so long as they do not carry contradictory messages, always guarantee an effective transmission, except in cases when the mode of transmission is straining or when the relationship with the Jewish parent is bad. Even if the theme of "choice" left the child is often perceived by the children themselves in adulthood as a form of hypocrisy (for they are confronted to an impossible construction), it is nevertheless common that successful transmissions are not established through flexibility: success is achieved through the maintenance of rites, through the acquisition of knowledge and the questions that ensue, illuminated in the light of intersubjectivity; it also relies on one's ability to create out of what was originally a void, so that the choice to affiliate with Judaism is not experienced as forced but rather as a freeing choice.

III – Analysis of the potential factors that can prevent one's affiliation to the Jewish world

First and foremost, we should note that the contemporary context is doubly disadvantageous for the transmission process: since decades, the progress of secularization destroys the process by which transmission is passed on "from one generation to the next." Additionally, European *Judaisms* are undergoing a crisis (with varying degrees of seriousness) linked to the rise of anti-Semitism, the challenges against religious freedom, and leadership issues.[10] In general terms, this is a crisis of representation as well as a form of divorce between community, religious elites, and "Jews from below."

These are general factors at play in the transmission process, but other family difficulties that present themselves are more directly fixable. We first deal with a lack of willingness to transmit and/or the contradictory messages on the part of the Jewish parent (or Jewish grandparents). It is striking to note the number of cases in which the Jewish parent goes to great lengths in order to evade the question of Jewish identity or sends mixed messages on that subject. Does this mean that exogamy reflects an initial desire to part with Judaism? We cannot draw such a conclusion for we lack the ability to compare with endogamous couples. Yet we can formulate the following commonsensical hypothesis: even if far from all Jews involved in a mixed couple wish to definitely disentangle themselves from Judaism, all Jews who do and are involved in exogamous relationships did so consciously. What our research unequivocally reflects is that few of those parents transmit a positive

[10] See recent resolution on the circumcision of the Council of Europe.

image of Judaism and Jewishness. Even fewer, in agreement with the non-Jewish spouse, think through coherent choices for their children whether they refuse to get involved in decision making in favor of a libertarian kind of education (bordering a refusal to educate), or whether they offer the child to reconcile nearly or clearly irreconcilable elements. These tendencies generate difficulties for those involved in mixed relationships: that which the parent does not consent to do in terms of problem solving naturally falls on the child - a burdensome charge indeed. Furthermore, a number of Jewish parents are powerless as to the task of transmitting for they have themselves inherited very little from their parents. This disregard for historical continuity and transmission tends to be related to the rupture of the Holocaust or to the historical experience of communism. Such tendencies are also found in families of assimilated French Jews, from whom Jewish identity utterly vanished under the influence of "republican assimilation."

Obstacles also exist in which the Jewish parent wishes to transmit Judaism in an extremely rigid frame that the child resents – let us note that such cases seem increasingly rare - especially parental conflicts on such religious and identity questions. Attempts by the Jewish parent or the family to coerce the non-Jewish spouse into imposing their choices does not seem to result in a desire to affiliate with the Jewish world. And whenever it does not completely inhibit that desire, it produces ambivalences feelings as well as future consequences. Conversely, hostility or prejudice on the part of the non-Jewish family against Jews can produce a violent oppositional reaction on the part of the child who will then no longer feel "mixed" or "interfaith" but, as it were, "doubly" Jewish; yet this can also contribute to the impairment of Jewish identity and to a desire to distance oneself from it, especially if the Jewish parent manifests indifference to Jewish culture and does not come to correct in any way the negative image conveyed. Encountering anti-Semitism might also generate ambivalent effects: it can either strengthen Jewish identity if one takes it as a challenge, or weaken it if one enters into a state of denial. Some interviewees seem to use the fact that they come from mixed backgrounds in order for them not to suffer the full effects of anti-Semitism, especially when their names are not identifiable as Jewish.

To conclude, let us note that the rejection from the Jewish community experienced by a number of people born of mixed marriages creates a number of disaffections, or, again, produces damaging ambivalences in the path toward identification with the Jewish world. Although the attitude of the *Consistoire* during the conversion process is often criticized and this episode is often a painful experience, our subjects seem to be more affected by experiences that occurred during their childhood or adolescence. Jewish institutions or associations may be the reason for which Jews born of mixed marriages experience refusals to be integrated as a violent rejection. This feeling may also be encountered with Jewish friends or Jewish family members who disqualify the possibility to affiliate with the Jewish world. Our interviewees tend to rationalize these events by putting forth a universal trend of intolerance, yet particular difficulties encountered with "official" or "semi- official" representatives of Judaism can produce a longer lasting form of resentment. This question is all the more important for these unfortunate events not only have the effect of permanently diverting individuals away from Judaism: they also reinforce more or less active outside sources. However, in most cases, the need to affiliate with the Jewish world seems stronger than the humiliation experienced, and a degree of "indulgence" against all odds prevails in our testimonies. The fact remains that these mishaps are unnecessary and amplify already complex psychological troubles.

IV – Conclusion. The Judaism of children born of interfaith relationships: a Judaism more conscious of itself?

One possible way to measure the strength of interviewees' sense of belonging to the Jewish world is to interrogate them on their own willingness to transmit Judaism. Rare are those considering themselves Jewish who do not intend to perpetuate Jewish identity through their children in one-way or another. However, there remains a gap between that desire and its effective possibility.

First, when it comes to choosing a life partner, most reject the idea that it be guided by religious identity or identity as such, and a number of interviewees happen to be in a relationship with non-Jews. Some, like Fanny, envisage getting married at Church. Mary, who defines herself as Jewish and Catholic, is in a relationship with a non-practicing cultural Muslim, which is a way for her to go beyond the dilemma of her background and therefore to simplify her situation, admitting at the same time that this makes things more complex. Let us note that some of these people who consider themselves Jewish admit that they refuse to live with Jews out of fear to confront their Jewish identity with another, more settled, Jewish identity, which they imaginatively turned into a Jewish judge. Paradoxically, they believe that such a relationship could weaken their Judaism, which they want to invent and master. Some of them "settle the issue" by meeting children born of mixed couples like themselves, who are just as "illegitimate" as they are.

In regards to children's education, our interviews contain contradictory problems. According to Marie-Anne, who has a Jewish father and Catholic mother, giving a Jewish education to her children would just be too "artificial." Fanny, who is in a relationship with a Catholic man who has an observant family, would not be hostile to the idea of having her children catholically baptized. Going back to Marie, she wishes to convey to her children "a kind of patchwork in which the three identities, Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim, would exist." Lucie, whose father is a Tunisian born Jew, is in a relationship with a man from Benin. She defines herself as "hybrid" and summarizes things as follows: "I know that there is a loss of transmission, my children will be even less Jewish than me." Unsurprisingly, the people who care most about their children's Jewish identity and who reject the idea of a "patched-up identity" are those who went through a conversion/confirmation process and who have an intimate relationship with a Jew. For instance, Laeticia, who was converted through Reform Judaism and who lives with a man whose father is Jewish, says: "My son is Jewish. The *Brit Milah* was a magical moment. I did not want to let my children experience what I did. I hope my son's girlfriends will be Jewish, otherwise I will tell him that he may suffer or let his children suffer." More generally, however, many want to pass on "something" of Judaism or Jewish history. Marine, whose mother is Jewish, wants to raise her children Jewish, insisting on choosing at their place: "May they feel that they belong to something to begin with, may they not be forced to go through the path I went through, because it was a long, hard one, and at times I turned away from it." But transmission conditions often take on evanescent forms. Most interviewees are hostile to the idea of circumcision for a son - or very hesitant - and others who consider it, like David, who "confirmed" his Judaism through the MJLF, perceive it as a "barbaric" custom. Sophie, whose father is a Polish Jew, chose to circumcise the son she had with a man who was himself born of a mixed couple (Jewish father), but she chose to do so at the hospital. She wants her son to do his *bar mitzvah*, probably through the MJLF, which she is a bit familiar with.

It is difficult to assess whether a truly sustainable Judaism is achievable in these newly formed households. But it seems: 1 – that Jewish history has, for most interviewees, an emotional load and a cultural interest that even years do not wane. 2 – that very few wish or manage to keep the context of a substantial transmission of Jewish identity,

grounded in religion, cultural, or a sense of belonging to a people.[11] Although this is not an encouraging prospect for the future of French Judaism, we can add two more positive elements: 1 - The households who renounce their Judaism keep "Jewish traces" of it within themselves. And they surely have the potential to promote a better understanding of the Jewish world in mainstream society; 2 - Although mixed marriages seem to create a *quantitative* problem for Jewish homes, they can produce interesting *qualitative* effects. Jewish households formed by children of mixed marriages will undoubtedly be stronger than traditional Jewish homes, for those are the result of a constant struggle and necessarily maintain a reflexive relationship with their Judaism – a reflexivity that fits the frame of the different expressions of the Jewish tradition, but that tends to get lost in most Jewish homes subjected to large waves of modern acculturation.

Finally, with regard to the care given to children of mixed marriages from Jewish institutions: beyond the attitude of the *Consistoire*, which often has a bad image, it is the often paternalistic and compassionate approach that all movements have that we need to question. We can illustrate the problem semantically: for instance, when one speaks of a need to "regularize," does it not imply that being born of intermarriage is a deviation of sorts that needs to be corrected? We should remind that although this situation is not a value in itself, it is certainly not a disease in need of therapy or a crime to be prosecuted. In a modern cosmopolitan society, it is neither a moral fault calling for repair nor a psychological disability requiring treatment. An integrative but patronizing discourse can but hurt sensibilities and discourage willingness. The people who reach out to Jewish institutions are not candidates for an exam waiting for a grade but are struggling with existential issues - sometimes vital.

Sociologists will struggle to reach a conclusion on such phenomenon with largely unpredictable mutations, yet they can at least make the following general proposal: if the blending of faiths is the story of the world, let us acknowledge that it is also a problem, which is to say a chance given to this *Kulturarbeit*[12], which consists precisely in taking nothing for granted, natural, or permanent.

[11] Especially if we consider the siblings of the respondents.

[12] The work of culture (Freud)

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