

Should They Stay Or Should They Go? The Rise Of Anti-Semitism in Europe

Contributed by [Leora Falk](#)

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The attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris left many wondering if this round of "in every generation" is different. Is the tenor of anti-Semitism in Europe now different than it has been since the Holocaust? Should Jews leave Europe or stay and rebuild their communities in Europe?

Is It Time for the Jews to Leave Europe?

By Jeffrey Goldberg

April, 2015

I asked him a very old Jewish question: Do you have a bag packed?

"We should not leave," he said, "but maybe for our children or grandchildren there will be no choice."

Reports suggested that a number of people were dead at the market. I said goodbye, and took the Métro to Porte de Vincennes. Stations near the market were closed, so I walked through neighborhoods crowded with police. Sirens echoed through the streets. Teenagers gathered by the barricades, taking selfies. No one had much information. One young man, however, said of the victims, "It's just the *Feuj*." *Feuj*, an inversion of *Juif*—"Jew"—is often used as a slur.

I located an acquaintance, a man who volunteers with the Jewish Community Security Service, a national organization founded after a synagogue bombing in 1980, to protect Jewish institutions from anti-Semitic attack. "Supermarkets now," he said bleakly. We made our way closer to the forward police line, and heard volleys of gunfire. The police had raided the market; the suspect, Amedy Coulibaly, we soon heard, was dead. So were four Jews he had murdered. They had been shopping for the Sabbath when he entered the market and started shooting.

France's 475,000 Jews represent less than 1 percent of the country's population. Yet last year, according to the French Interior Ministry, 51 percent of all racist attacks targeted Jews. The statistics in other countries, including Great Britain, are similarly dismal. In 2014, Jews in Europe were murdered, raped, beaten, stalked, chased, harassed, spat on, and insulted for being Jewish. *Salé Juif*—"dirty Jew"—rang in the streets, as did "Death to the Jews," and "Jews to the gas."

The epithet *dirty Jew*, Zola wrote in "J'Accuse ...!," was the "scourge of our time." "J'Accuse ...!" was published in 1898....

The Shoah served for a while as a sort of inoculation against the return of overt Jew-hatred—but the effects of the inoculation, it is becoming clear, are wearing off. What was once impermissible is again imaginable. Memories of 6 million Jewish dead fade,

and guilt becomes burdensome. (In *The Eternal Anti-Semite*, the writer Henryk Broder popularized the notion that “the Germans will never forgive the Jews for Auschwitz.”) Israel is coming to be understood not as a small country in a difficult spot whose leaders, especially lately, have (in my opinion) been making shortsighted and potentially disastrous decisions, but as a source of cosmological evil—the Jew of nations.

An argument made with increasing frequency—motivated, perhaps, by some perverse impulse toward psychological displacement—calls Israel the spiritual and political heir of the Third Reich, rendering the Jews as Nazis. (Some in Europe and the Middle East take this line of thought to an even more extreme conclusion: “Those who condemn Hitler day and night have surpassed Hitler in barbarism,” the president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said last year of Israel.)

The previously canonical strain of European anti-Semitism, the fascist variant, still flourishes in places. In Hungary, a leader of the right-wing Jobbik party called on the government—a government that has come under criticism for whitewashing the history of Hungary’s collaboration with the Nazis—to draw up a list of all the Jews in the country who might pose a “national-security risk.” In Greece, a recent survey found that 69 percent of adults hold anti-Semitic views, and the fascists of the country’s Golden Dawn party are open in their Jew-hatred....

But what makes this new era of anti-Semitic violence in Europe different from previous ones is that traditional Western patterns of anti-Semitic thought have now merged with a potent strain of Muslim Judeophobia. Violence against Jews in Western Europe today, according to those who track it, appears to come mainly from Muslims, who in France, the epicenter of Europe’s Jewish crisis, outnumber Jews 10 to 1.

That the chief propagators of contemporary European anti-Semitism may be found in the Continent’s large and disenfranchised Muslim immigrant communities—communities that are themselves harassed and assaulted by hooligans associated with Europe’s surging right—is flummoxing to, among others, Europe’s elites. Muslims in Europe are in many ways a powerless minority. The failure of Europe to integrate Muslim immigrants has contributed to their exploitation by anti-Semitic propagandists and by recruiters for such radical projects as the Islamic State, or ISIS.

Yet the new anti-Semitism flourishing in corners of the European Muslim community would be impoverished without the incorporation of European fascist tropes. Dieudonné M’bala M’bala, a comedian of French Cameroonian descent who specializes in Holocaust revisionism and gas-chamber humor, is the inventor of the *quenelle*, widely understood as an inverted Nazi salute. His followers have taken to photographing themselves making the *quenelle* in front of synagogues, Holocaust memorials, and sites of past anti-Jewish terrorist attacks. Dieudonné has built an ideological partnership with Alain Soral, the anti-Jewish conspiracy theorist and 9/11 “truther” who was for several years a member of the National Front’s central committee. Soral was photographed not long ago making the *quenelle* in front of Berlin’s Holocaust memorial.

The union of Middle Eastern and European forms of anti-Semitic expression has led to bizarre moments. Dave Rich, an official of the Community Security Trust, a Jewish organization that monitors anti-Semitism in the United Kingdom, wrote recently: “Those British Muslims who verbally abuse British Jews on the street are more likely to shout ‘Heil Hitler’ than ‘*Allahu akbar*’ when they do so. This is despite the fact

that their parents and grandparents were probably chased through the very same streets by gangs of neo-Nazi skinheads shouting similar slogans.”

The marriage of anti-Semitic narratives was consummated in January of last year, during a so-called Day of Rage march in Paris that was organized to protest the leadership of the French president, François Hollande. The rally drew roughly 17,000 people, mostly far-rightists but also many French Muslims.

“On one side of this march, you had neonationalist and reactionary Catholics, who had strongly and violently opposed gay marriage, and on the other side young people from the banlieues [suburbs], supporters of Dieudonné, often from African and North African background, whose beliefs are based in opposition to the ‘system’ and on victimhood competition,” Simone Rodan-Benzaquen, the Paris director of the American Jewish Committee, told me. “What unites them is their hatred of Jews.” That day, on the streets of Paris, the anti-Hollande message was overtaken by another chanted slogan: “*Juif, la France n’est pas à toi*”—“Jew, France is not for you.”...

The fight against anti-Semitism led by Merkel, Valls, and Cameron appears to be heartfelt. The question is, will it work? After the January massacres in Paris, the French government deployed several thousand soldiers to protect Jewish institutions, but it cannot assign soldiers to protect every Jew walking to and from the Métro. The governments of Europe are having a terrible time in their struggle against the manifestations of radical Islamist ideology. And the general publics of these countries do not seem nearly as engaged in the issue as their leaders. The Berlin rally last fall against anti-Semitism that featured Angela Merkel drew a paltry 5,000 people, most of whom were Jews. It is a historical truism that, as Manuel Valls told me, “what begins with Jews doesn’t end with Jews.” But this notion has not penetrated public opinion.

Nevertheless, comparisons to 1933 remain overripe.

“It’s not 1933 all over again, because it’s not generally acceptable to try to mobilize political power by making explicitly anti-Semitic arguments,” David Nirenberg, a scholar of anti-Semitism at the University of Chicago, told me. “We’re not at a moment when you can make a mass democratic argument about Jews as aliens. The danger here, and the reason French Jews, for instance, fear not having Manuel Valls in office forever, is that if political power isn’t willing to protect European Jews against minority movements that legitimate themselves through anti-Zionist discourse, no one is going to protect them.”...

A large majority of American Jews feels affection for Israel, and is concerned for its safety, and understands the role it plays as a home of last resort for endangered brethren around the world. But very few American Jews, in my experience, believe they will ever need to make use of the Israeli lifeboat. The American Jewish community faces enormous challenges, but these mainly have to do with assimilation, and with maintaining cultural identity and religious commitment. To be sure, anti-Semitism exists in the United States—and in my experience, some European Jewish leaders are quite ready to furnish examples to anyone suggesting that European Jews might be better off in America. According to the latest FBI statistics, from 2013, Jews are by far the most-frequent victims of religiously motivated hate crimes in America. But this is still anti-Semitism on the margins. A recent Pew poll found that Jews are also the most warmly regarded religious group in America.

For millennia, Jews have been asking this question: Where, exactly, is it safe? Maimonides, the 12th-century philosopher, wrestled with this question continually, asking himself whether it was better for Jews to live in the lands of Esau—Christendom—or in the lands of Ishmael.

“The thing about this question is that it is always about a decision made at a specific point in time,” David Nirenberg, the University of Chicago scholar, told me. “If you looked around the world in 1890, you might have said Germany and England were the best places. If you’re looking around the world in 1930, you could have made a good argument that the United States was not a great place for Jews.”

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Last spring, on a visit to Chişinău, the capital of Moldova, the former Soviet republic situated between Romania and Ukraine, I met a delightful group of Jews in their teens and 20s, most of whom had learned only recently that they were Jewish. This is a common occurrence in Europe’s east; the collapse of communism has allowed Jews to admit to themselves, and to their children, the truth of their origins. (This is becoming a phenomenon in other countries as well. A 2008 genetic study found that about 20 percent of the populations of Spain and Portugal have some Jewish heritage.) Barbara Spectre, the Jewish educator in Sweden, calls these people the “dis-assimilated.” The youth group I encountered meets each week to learn Jewish prayers and sing Jewish songs.

The modest rebirth of Jewish life in Chişinău is a remarkable thing, because Chişinău, which is known in Russian as Kishinev, was the location, in 1903, of one of the most terrible pogroms in European history—a pogrom that turned tens of thousands of Jews toward Zionism, and sent many more on the path to America. Included in this latter group was a branch of my family. My grandfather grew up in a

pogrom-afflicted village, not far from Kishinev, called Leova.

One afternoon, I met Moldova's then-prime minister, Iurie Leancă, to discuss the return of another sort of European historical pathology—Vladimir Putin's attempt to rebuild the Russian empire at the expense of, among others, Leancă's small and hapless country. The prime minister, a progressive, pro-Western politician, was eager to make his case for American support, but he was especially eager to tell me of his sadness that Moldova is home to so few Jews today. He was touchingly sincere; my grandfather would have been moved—and incredulous. As I was leaving, the prime minister mentioned that he was trying to raise funds to build a Jewish museum in Chişinău. The parliament is willing, he said, but the country is poor. "A friend of mine said I should ask the Rothschilds for help," he said. "Do you know any Rothschilds?"

The next day, I drove an hour southwest to Leova. My grandfather had painted vivid pictures of his shtetl youth, and Leova, which has not left poverty in the intervening century, came alive before my eyes. Here was the river where he watered the half-blind family horse; here was the Jewish cemetery; here, down a muddy path, was the old synagogue; here was the church where the priests denounced the Christ-killers.

There are no Jews left in Leova. What used to be the synagogue is now a gymnasium; the caretaker tried to sell it to me. The Holocaust history of Leova is incompletely known, but the last Jews appear to have been rounded up in late 1941 by Germany's Romanian allies. According to records in the Moldovan State Archives, this group included six people who I believe were part of my grandfather's family, among them five children, ages 15, 12, 9, 7, and 3. Their last known destination was a concentration camp in Cahul, in what is today southern Moldova.

I am predisposed to believe that there is no great future for the Jews in Europe, because evidence to support this belief is accumulating so quickly. But I am also predisposed to think this because I am an American Jew—which is to say, a person who exists because his ancestors made a run for it when they could.