

## They Should Stay

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*Slate:* We'll Always Have Paris

By William Saletan

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"Is it time for the Jews to leave Europe?" That's the question Jeffrey Goldberg raises in a richly reported article in the *Atlantic*. He concludes that perhaps they should, due to resurgent anti-Semitism. "For Jews who would like to stay Jewish in some sort of meaningful way," he writes, "there are better places than Europe."

Goldberg is a marvelous writer, and his article is sobering. But his answer is incomplete. Identity isn't just about your ethnicity or your faith. It's also about your nationality. For Frenchmen who would like to stay French in some meaningful way, there are better religions than Judaism. That doesn't mean it's time to leave Judaism.

So let's turn the question around. How can we help Jews stay in Europe? What's the best way to reassure a French Jew that she can keep both her country and her religion?

Goldberg's article doesn't explicitly answer that question. But it does illuminate the structure of the problem. Once you understand that structure, you get a general idea of how the problem could be solved. You also begin to see how much worse things could get if we try to solve it in the wrong way.

In the article, the person who comes across as understanding the problem most clearly is Marine Le Pen, the leader of France's National Front. She says anti-Semitism watchdogs in her country have been looking the wrong way. They're on guard against old-style Nazism. "While they were fighting against an enemy that no longer existed," she tells Goldberg, "an anti-Semitism was gaining force in France stemming notably from the development of fundamentalist Islamist thought."

Goldberg's reporting bears out her point. Though he's careful not to disparage Muslims as a group, the anti-Semitic massacres he recounts—Toulouse in 2012, Brussels in 2014, Paris in 2015—were all the work of jihadists. He also finds anti-Semitic patterns in his interviews with European Muslims. This isn't your führer's anti-Semitism. It has been brought to Europe by immigrants.

Goldberg says European anti-Semitism "would be impoverished without the incorporation of European fascist tropes" such as the quenelle, an inverted Nazi salute. But his reporting suggests almost the opposite: Anti-Semitism is flourishing among Muslims in Europe not because they understand Nazism, but because they don't. To them, anti-Semitism is a salute. Their families weren't in Europe when the salute was accompanied by the extermination of 6 million Jews. They haven't absorbed the history, the horror, or the shame. They missed the inoculation.

Two incidents recounted in Goldberg's article illustrate the effect. One involves a Danish imam who was speaking at a Berlin mosque last year. He said of Jews: "Count them and kill them to the very last one. Don't spare a single one of them." After his statement was exposed, he pleaded that he "never meant all Jews." That's the kind of excuse you would never offer if you understood the Holocaust. Understanding the Holocaust means understanding that when somebody says, "Kill all the Jews," he means, "Kill all the Jews."

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The other episode took place in Lebanon. Hezbollah, the radical Muslim militia that dominates that country, has been working to keep *The Diary of Anne Frank* out of Lebanese schools. This kind of denialism, perpetrated in the Middle East, makes people susceptible to anti-Semitism when they grow up and emigrate to Europe. If you don't grow up in a place that experienced the Holocaust, and if you don't learn about the Holocaust in some other way, you'll behave like somebody who doesn't get it.

I don't mean to suggest that Muslims don't understand anti-Semitism. They do. But the anti-Semitism they're familiar with is the anti-Semitism of resentment, not the anti-Semitism of genocidal success. Goldberg describes a French Jew whose parents fled Tunisia in 1967, "driven out by anti-Jewish rioters who were putatively distressed by Israel's victory in the Six-Day War." The key word in that sentence is *victory*. If Israel had lost—if the Jews of Palestine had been annihilated—Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa might understand anti-Semitism the way Europeans do. Anti-Semitism isn't about a chant or a salute. It's about piles of corpses.

Nor do I mean to exonerate the majority of Europeans who are neither Muslim nor Jewish. They've played their part in the intimidation of Jews by not playing their part in stopping it. Goldberg credits leaders of Germany, France, and Britain for denouncing anti-Semitism. But he points out that "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." And the silence of the majority leaves Jews feeling isolated. "Everyone is saying ' *Je suis Charlie* ' today," a Jewish student in Paris tells Goldberg, alluding to outrage over the murder of cartoonists at *Charlie Hebdo*. "But this has been happening to the Jews for years and no one cares." Another student, using the French term for "Jewish," suggests: "It would be nice if someone would say ' *Je suis Juif* .'"

Why don't non-Muslim Europeans care more about the new anti-Semitism? One reason is that they aren't Jews. But another reason is that they aren't Muslims. They're neither the victims nor the perpetrators. They feel neither the threat nor the responsibility.

Le Pen seems to understand much of this. Goldberg explains that she's trying to recast the National Front—a right-wing French party with a history of anti-Semitism—as a protector of Jews. Her message, according to Goldberg, is that "the rise of Islamism in France poses an existential threat to the republican idea, and to the bedrock principle of *laïcité*, or secularism." Yes, the National Front is a threat to Muslims. But Muslims are a threat to Jews, by her logic, so the National Front is a friend to Jews.

Le Pen's solution, Goldberg reports, is to "strip 'jihadists' of their citizenship, end immigration, and reinforce *laïcité* by limiting the public expression of religion." She implies that this would squelch the new anti-Semitism. But she can't explain why it wouldn't revive the old anti-Semitism.

Goldberg points to the French right's campaign to outlaw Muslim veils. The rationale is that such veils are an affront to French secularism and solidarity. He asks Le Pen whether she would also bar Jews from wearing a kippah in public. "I think the meaning is not the same," she tells him. "We know very well that the proliferation of the wearing of the veil—and in certain neighborhoods, the burka—is a political act." But it's easy to say the same about the kippah. Anyone who wants to turn the power of the state against Jews will simply reinterpret the kippah as a political statement.

Le Pen tells Goldberg, "I don't see Jews as a *community*. ... I see fellow countrymen who are of Jewish faith but who are fellow countrymen, and I think that all French have the right to see themselves protected from the threats that weigh on them." She presents this as a simple statement of nondiscrimination. But when you read the statement in light of her efforts to suppress religious expression, there's a worrisome undertone. Fundamentally, we're all French. So shut up about your faith.

If I were a Jew in Europe, I don't think I'd leave. Growing up in Texas, I had many encounters—slurs, threats, occasional minor violence—similar to those described by Goldberg as anti-Semitic. They were anti-Semitic. I just had to deal with them. One thing that helped me get through it was the belief that my tormentors represented an ignorant, dying past. The best way to help today's European Jews is to give them the same confidence, by working on the ignorance at the heart of Muslim anti-Semitism. To do that, you have to focus on the ignorance, not the Islam.