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The silent disappearance of Jews from Algeria: French anti-racism in the face of antisemitism in Algeria during the decolonization

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ABSTRACT


The decolonization of Algeria with the Algerian War of Independence from 1954–1962 placed Jews in a vulnerable situation. The purpose of this study is to expose to what extent and in what way the French anti-racist organizations paid attention to the situation of Algerian Jews before, during, and after decolonization. The focus is on the Paris-based *Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme* (LICA, today LICRA), the *Mouvement contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et pour la paix* (MRAP) and the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (LDH). Although the organizations' attitudes differed, ranging from ignorance to commitment to the Jews in Algeria, they did not support the Jews in Algeria with any important campaigns or demonstrations. While the LDH largely ignored the Jewish dilemma, the MRAP tended to portray the future of Jews in independent Algeria as bright. The LICA was the only one of the three anti-racist organizations that openly denounced antisemitism in the Arab world, while it never initiated any anti-racist campaigns in favour of Jews in Algeria. Overall, the article argues that the lack of significant anti-racist responses is characteristic of the silent disappearance of Jewish culture and society from Algeria.

KEYWORDS

French anti-racism; Algeria; decolonization; Jews; Arabs; antisemitism

Introduction

In the decades following the end of the Second World War the withdrawal of colonial powers from territories in North Africa and the Middle East in many cases left Jews in vulnerable positions. As anticolonial nationalism spread, intensified by the Arab-Israeli conflict, most of the Jewish communities disappeared from the region within three decades.¹ In the shadow of the Holocaust and colonial abuses, the departure of Jews from the Arab world has received comparatively limited attention.² To better understand the wider

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context of this historical process and its aftermath, it is relevant to study how contemporary observers commented and acted upon the departure and expulsion of Jews from this region. The present article does so by focusing on reactions within the French anti-racist movements to the plight of Jews, with a particular focus on Algeria. The decolonization of Algeria with the Algerian War of Independence from 1954–1962 had a large impact on the French anti-racist movement and most of the Algerian Jews also moved to France at the end of the war. The purpose of this study is to expose to what extent and in what way the anti-racist organizations paid attention to the situation of Algerian Jews before, during, and in the years after decolonization. This can provide a deeper understanding of the Jewish experience during decolonization in Algeria and, more specifically, of how this experience was reflected within the French anti-racist movement, as well as how activism against antisemitism conflicted with other political interests during this political process. The article furthermore includes comparisons with reactions to the Jewish situation in other Arab countries, as well as to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in order to contextualize attitudes to the Jewish dilemma in Algeria.

The Algerian population consists of Arabs and Berbers, often referred to as the Muslims at the time, and until independence was gained in 1962, it also included significant European and Jewish populations. Part of the Jewish population in Algeria belonged to very old settlements dating back to the first century BCE. A large portion of the population had furthermore arrived in North Africa following the Jewish expulsion from Spain and Portugal at the end of the fifteenth century. When Algeria was conquered by France in 1830, the Jews became subject to European rule and the French authority limited the power of the traditional Jewish leadership.³ The path towards integration or even assimilation of Jews into French civilization was embarked upon by the French government with the important Crémieux Decree, which granted French citizenship to most Algerian Jews collectively in 1870.⁴ The influence of the Crémieux Decree on Algerian Jews partly explains why, during the process of Algeria gaining its independence, Jews were perceived not only as a Jewish minority but also as Europeans since Arabs did not benefit from the status given by the Crémieux Decree. Although Jews in Algeria felt themselves victims of the colonial settlers' racial intolerance, they adopted to a large extent French culture and republican values after being granted citizenship. However, as Pierre-Jean Le Foll-Luciani has argued, this was not a straight-forward or unequivocal development within the heterogeneous Jewish population.⁵ With the rise of Arab nationalism, Islamic movements and the Muslim Brotherhood, life became more difficult for Jews in the Arab world in general, particularly after the defeat of Arab military forces in Israel in 1948 and 1956. In Algeria, *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) first regarded the Jews as allies, but the Algerian War of Independence placed them in a very difficult and challenging position, as the national movement required loyalty of Jews as a group, and

various forms of anti-Jewish manifestations and riots increased during war. Most of the 140,000 Algerian Jews left in 1962 due to anti-Jewish sentiments and assaults as well as an identification with republican France.⁶ Due to this identification with France, less than 10 percent of the Jews from Algeria moved to Israel.⁷ The departure of Jews, however, did not stop antisemitism from developing. As a result of the new National Code of Algeria, in the year after independence was gained, almost all the remaining Jews were excluded from Algerian nationality due to their status as non-Muslims.⁸ Popular antisemitism was also particularly intense all over the Arab world, including in Algeria, at the time of the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria.⁹

The French anti-racist movement, with its different organizations, was an important aspect of republican political culture during the twentieth century, which both appealed to and challenged the republican nation state.¹⁰ The organizations that this study will address set out to play a political, legal and educational role in France by informing about discrimination in addition to grassroots activism. A comparative focus on anti-racist organizations thus shows how segments of the progressive left acted on behalf of a vulnerable minority during the decolonization and to what extent the Algerian Jewish dilemma was included in the anti-racist activism in metropolitan France. The French anti-racist movement consisted of three major organizations during the first post-war decades, including the *Ligue des droits de l'homme*, or LDH, which is basically a human rights organization but is often considered as part of the anti-racist movement.¹¹ The LDH was founded in 1898 during the Dreyfus Affair in France and evolved into a republican left-wing organization with a close connection to French political life.¹² The second organization, *Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme* (LICA, its acronym changed to LICRA in 1979) was founded in 1928 under the leadership of Bernard Lecache. Although the LICA had from the beginning an important focus on discrimination against Jews, the organization sought constantly to broaden its activism to other groups. During the Second World War, Lecache sought refuge in Algeria but was interned in two different camps until the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942.¹³ The third organization is *Mouvement contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et pour la paix* (MRAP; today *Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples*), created in 1949, has its roots among former Jewish Resistance activists and its leader had a close relationship with the Communist party.¹⁴ All three organizations shared a political attachment to republican values and particularly the LICA and the MRAP had a large number of Jews among their members and maintained connections to Jewish life in France.¹⁵ The LICA and the LDH had sections in Algeria, but the traces of activities during the post-war period are relatively few.¹⁶ The focus of this article is the discussions and statements of the head offices in Paris.

This article is chronologically arranged. The first part deals with how the organizations confronted antisemitism in the Arab world in general after the

Second World War and until the Algerian War of Independence. While Jewish-Arab relations in Algeria had been an important focus for LICA in the interwar period,¹⁷ the organizations largely ignored this context and focused instead on the situation of Jews in the Middle East. The second part concentrates on the Algerian war of independence and shows an increasing discussion and disagreement on antisemitism in Algeria but still no concrete action. The last part addresses the aftermath of the war—independence, up until the 1970s – and exposes how the organizations successively moved their attention from Algeria to the Arab-Israeli conflict, while Jewish life quickly disappeared from the former French colony. The concluding discussion emphasizes the article’s overall argument regarding how the lack of significant anti-racist responses, as well as political differences between the organizations and activists, shaped attitudes towards the Jewish dilemma in Algeria.

Jewish-Arab relations and the reappearance of antisemitism

Antisemitism was still a major preoccupation within the French anti-racist movement after the Second World War. However, it was not Algeria or French North Africa that drew anti-racist attention in the Arab world in the aftermath of the war, but the creation of Israel. Although Zionism had influenced Jews and Arabs prior to the Second World War, the founding of a new Jewish state contributed to a new articulation of Jewish and non-Jewish relations.¹⁸ From the beginning, the anti-racist movement in France was involved in this conflict, which opened new horizons for activism as well as a new understanding of the vulnerable position of Jews in the Middle East. The LDH supported the formation of Israel, and the central committee furthermore criticized the delay of the French Government’s recognition of Israel in 1948.¹⁹ This criticism was connected to a wider concern about authoritarian tendencies of Arab leaders and the Arab League. The LDH also feared that the potential spread of war in the Middle East could lead to tensions in French North Africa. In Algeria, the organization had, from the beginning of the twentieth century, supported a more democratic colonial policy and condemned different forms of discrimination or violation of justice but not the colonial system itself.²⁰ But even though the LDH regarded Arab nationalism as a new threat directly associated with the politics of Hitler,²¹ the organization did not initiate any campaigns or discussions about Jews in the Arab world outside of Palestine in the immediate post-war period. Indeed, as a republican organization, the LDH tended to avoid the ethnic dimension of human rights issues, rather focusing more generally on the importance of an inclusive citizenship and the principle of secularism (*laïcité*).

Since its formation, LICA was more dedicated to the question of antisemitism, although Lecache wanted to broaden its activism when the organization was reconstructed after the Nazi occupation. However, antisemitism was still

a central concern for LICA, and the organization adopted an increasingly positive attitude towards Israel in the 1950s, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of positive interethnic relations between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East.²² In Algeria, LICA's attitude was also shaped by ideas of broader alliances and the interwar campaign of a "Judeo-Muslim rapprochement" in North Africa.²³ This campaign was influenced by the Popular Front and the Blum-Violette proposal for Algeria, which would have opened the path for further integration of Muslims in Algeria. LICA continued to defend a multi-ethnic Algeria as an integrated part of France after the Second World War and sought to reorganize sections including Jews, Christians and Muslims in Algeria and Tunisia according to this orientation.²⁴ However, the outcome of these efforts remains obscure and no major campaign was initiated as during the 1930s. Overall, the situation of Jews in Algeria did not attract any particular attention prior to the Algerian war for independence, as the general view of Arab and Jewish cohabitation in Algeria was still positive. It is revealing that one of the few times that the situation of the North African Jews was noticed in the late 1940s related to discrimination of the group in Israel and not in the French colonies.²⁵

MRAP was also initially positive towards Israel, which did not exclude strong solidarity with Arabs and their national aspiration in the Middle East. Beyond Israel, the organization also campaigned in favour of Jews in Iraq in 1949–1951. This solidarity shows a more general interest in the fate of Jews in Arab lands during the early post-war period. The situation of Jews in Iraq was at the time in a very critical phase. Persecutions inspired by the government continued to escalate in the 1940s and led to an emigration to Israel in 1951 and 1952.²⁶ The campaign of MRAP, which involved various protest meetings, was motivated by frustration about the difficulty of mobilizing Jewish and non-Jewish opinion against the pogroms.²⁷ The painful memory of the Holocaust was important among the activists, and the journal of the organization noted several parallels and comparisons between Jews during the Second World War and Iraqi Jews in the immediate post-war period.²⁸

At the same time, MRAP was careful to point out that the Iraqi people were not hostile to Jews, and the organization paid very limited attention to interethnic dimension of the hostilities and persecution.²⁹ The responsibility for the anti-Jewish politics was instead laid on imperialist interests in the region as well as the capitalist quest for oil.³⁰ However, the campaign in favour of Iraqi Jews did not lead to any continuing commitment to Jews in Arab lands or in French Algeria. The developing Cold War brought new polarizations around the political situation in the Middle East, and under the influence of the Communist Party, MRAP also changed its positive attitude toward Israel in the early 1950s and basically avoided the subject, which coincided with changes in Soviet policy towards Israel.³¹ The interest in the situation of Jews in Arab lands was simultaneously replaced by an increasing interest in Arabs as victims of racism

in France. The organization again invoked the memory of the Holocaust in France to explain the situation of Arabs in France.³²

Jewish dilemmas during the Algerian war of independence

The Algerian War of Independence started in November 1954 and ended with the independence of Algeria after the Evian Accords in March, 1962. The Jews in Algeria, who numbered around 140,000 in 1954, were increasingly haunted by the painful choice of leaving or staying, which ended in a mass exodus in 1962 when the country's separation from France was finalized.³³ Although the attitudes and reactions to Algerian nationalism varied according to social, geographical and generational circumstances, only a minority embraced the national cause of emancipation.³⁴ Most of the Jews tried to remain neutral, while FLN with the famous Soummam Congress in August 1956 insisted that the Algerian Jews belonged to Algeria and furthermore demanded the Jewish population affirm their belonging to the nation.³⁵ As a result, Jews who wanted to remain neutral during the escalating conflict could be considered traitors to the Algerian national cause in the various declarations and open calls to recruit Jews the following years after the Soummam Congress. The beginning of the war also included anti-Jewish violence and in the turbulent period between the Soummam congress of August 1956 and de Gaulle's return to power in May 1958, around ninety attacks by Algerian nationalists targeted Jews and Jewish institutions, which obviously conflicted with the FLN's request of loyalty to the national cause.³⁶ The overall situation led to the first significant departures of Jews in 1957 and the violence against Jews continued to escalate in the subsequent years.³⁷

During the war, LICA paid increasing attention to the situation of the Jews and condemned anti-Jewish attacks on several occasions. At the same time, interwar campaigns to build friendly relations between Jews and Arabs as well as the ambition to represent the interests of all groups influenced a tendency to downplay or at least nuance antisemitism within FLN and among Arabs in Algeria. One incident indicative of this tendency occurred when Jacques Soustelle, who was Governor General of Algeria in 1955–1956, called on LICA to act against antisemitism after attacks on Jews in Constantine had culminated with a bomb in a Jewish café in Constantine in May 1956, which inspired a Jewish counterattack. In a letter published in LICA's journal, *Le droit de vivre*, Soustelle depicted the development in Constantine in the context of an increasing racist hatred against Israel and Jewish communities within the Arab world, and he warned that this could be followed by a pogrom like that of August 1934 in Constantine.³⁸ During these anti-Jewish riots in 1934, twenty-five Jews had been killed by Arabs and the violent situation also caused the death of three Arabs.³⁹ Soustelle furthermore pointed out a problem which would haunt parts of the radical left during years to

come when he rhetorically asked if one was to close their eyes because the responsibility of the attacks in 1956 invoked anticolonialism, the right to self-determination and other democratic principles.⁴⁰ The response of LICA to this serious description of antisemitism was rather distant as the organization did not call any members to act or try to mobilize sections in Algeria. Although Lecache condemned the attacks on Jews and the “bloody aspects of xenophobic pan-Arabism,”⁴¹ he replied to Soustelle in an open letter by stressing that LICA must also condemn racism against Muslims and Christians and not establish a hierarchy in the reprobation of crime. This implied that LICA could not act upon anti-Jewish crimes without paying attention to other potentially victimized groups in Algeria. The anti-Jewish attacks should furthermore be understood as a part of the conflict, rather than as antisemitism in Algeria:

We cannot separate the anti-Jewish attack in Constantine from the overall situation and its international consequences. It is not only the Algerian Jews who must be saved from a directed fanaticism but, with them, the Muslims and the French non-Jews or non-Muslims of Algeria.⁴²

The Jewish dilemma was, in other words, part of the larger violent escalation and at this stage not depicted as a problem in its own right. This orientation must be seen in the context of LICA’s attempt to broaden its anti-racist activism to several groups and to not appear to be a Jewish organization. LICA furthermore wanted to revive the sections in North Africa during the 1950s, and it was suggested that such activism should include Muslim participants,⁴³ which might explain the importance of stressing the victimhood of all groups after the anti-Jewish attacks in Constantine in 1956.

LICA was at the same time particularly vigilant against nationalism within the Arab world in general. Nasser was repeatedly linked to Hitler during and after the Suez Crisis in 1956. For example, Michel Aidenbaum, within the central committee of LICA, stated during a meeting in 1956 that “pan-Arabism is not better than pan-Germanism,” when he warned about the domestic antisemitism of Nasser.⁴⁴ LICA also paid attention to the situation of Jews in independent Morocco. On June 23, 1956, the organization made a statement in *Le Figaro* to protest the interdiction against Jews in Morocco emigrating to Israel. The situation in Morocco would be exacerbated in the following years due to arrests of Jews involved in the clandestine emigration to Israel at the beginning of the 1960s. LICA acted resolutely upon the information of these arrests. Besides issuing public criticism, Lecache wrote letters to the king in Morocco and the Attorney General of the Supreme Court of Rabat to protest the arrests of Jews.⁴⁵ Lecache was also concerned about the situation of Tunisian and Moroccan Jewish refugees in France at the end of the 1950s, and he also wanted to establish a section for North Africans in Paris.⁴⁶ This initiative, however, seems not to have been realized.

MRAP developed the discourse of mutual friendship between Arabs and Jews in Algeria even further and frequently underscored the importance of further improving this relationship. The FLN's request of Jewish loyalty to the national cause a few months after the Soummam Congress in 1956 was, for example, interpreted as a reminder of the traditional friendship between Jews and Muslims.⁴⁷ The underlying threat of this declaration that they should abandon neutrality towards the political aspirations of FLN was ignored. While the situation of Jews in the newly independent neighbouring Morocco at this time was rather uncertain, MRAP witnessed the positive relationship between Muslims and Jews after the country had gained its independence.⁴⁸ By emphasizing positive aspects of Jewish-Arab relations in the region, MRAP tended to overlook the problems and dilemmas for Jews or to understand these issues from the perspective of FLN. MRAP also gave space to the rather marginal voices of Algerian Jews who defended the political orientation of FLN and reproduced calls for Jewish loyalty to the Algerian nation-in-making. After the anti-Jewish attacks in Constantine in 1956, MRAP published a letter from a group of the city's Jewish residents. The letter not only held the colonial settlers responsible for the increasing interethnic tensions but also pointed out that some Jews had helped the police that year in raids—which preceded the attacks in Constantine's Jewish neighbourhood—against the city's Muslim population.⁴⁹ A few months later MRAP published excerpts from a new statement from a "number of Algerian personalities of Israelite origin," which replied positively to the FLN's request for loyalty by affirming the Jews belonging to the Algerian nation.⁵⁰ The main aim of MRAP at this time was to show the unanimity of Algerians and to work for the improvement of relations between Muslims and Jews.⁵¹ Another important focus for MRAP, in terms of anti-racist campaigns, was still to oppose the discrimination of Algerians in Paris. However, MRAP also paid attention to, and campaigned against, antisemitism towards North African Jews in Paris.⁵² In these instances the responsibility was laid on traditional right-wing circles or police authorities.⁵³

The Algerian War of Independence had a major impact on the LDH's activism and contributed to the generational shift within the organization. From 1956, when the French government was granted "special powers" to act in Algeria under the state of emergency, the organization became increasingly critical towards French policy in Algeria and defended the Algerian people's right to decide their own fate without adhering to the positions of FLN.⁵⁴ However, the LDH did not pay any particular attention to the fate of Jews during the Algerian War of Independence but it did reject everything related to pan-Arabism as it was associated with Nasser and his aggressive politics in the region. Any such tendency in Algeria was considered to be a threat to the non-Muslim population. In a resolution of 1956, where a few points were listed concerning the future regime of Algeria after the war, it was emphasized

that the government should guarantee the cultural and religious customs of both Muslims and non-Muslims.⁵⁵ Although the organization did not explicitly mention Jews in this resolution, a cultural homogenization of Algeria, which the LDH feared, would obviously have a direct impact on the Europeans and Jews, both non-Muslim populations.

In the early 1960s, FLN activism began to become increasingly visible in France and have a greater impact on the left. The campaigns against the colonial regime among various left-wing groups still did not necessarily call for an independent Algeria, but they denounced the violence of the French state and human rights abuses.⁵⁶ When the branch of FLN based in France, *Fédération de France du FLN*, published statements about the organization's position on Jews, they were quoted and summarized in *Le Monde* in February 1960. The excerpt from the quoted statement again raised the question of Jewish loyalty as the Jews were asked to take an active part in the fight for independence. The FLN also urged the Jews to affirm their adherence to the ideal of independence and to "dispel ambiguities which risk compromising our future relations."⁵⁷ The quoted statement in *Le Monde* was interpreted and used differently within the anti-racist movement. MRAP, on the one hand, republished excerpts from this declaration but left out the threat about dispelling ambiguities.⁵⁸ In that way, the address to the Jews appeared as positive as it only again underlined the group's belonging to the Algerian nation. On the other hand, Georges Zérapha, within the central committee of LICA, criticized this way of reframing the declaration and also condemned the declaration itself. According to Zérapha, the declaration forecast an official antisemitism from FLN. He also gave a personal reflection on this declaration from his own experience as an Algerian Jew living in France and expressed an ideological position in favour of the maintenance of French Algeria in 1960:

A Jew born in Algeria, of Algerian parents and grandparents, I am deeply shocked by these ideas and by this tone.

I do not know if there is an Algerian people, but, if this people exists, the Jews were never part of it.

Certainly, French citizenship was granted to us by the conquerors, but, far from regretting it, we are grateful to France for having made known to us the treasures of its civilization.

Algerian Jews do not have to choose their homeland. If they had to choose it, I doubt they would prefer the FLN to France.⁵⁹

The central committee of LICA had a more cautious attitude towards Algeria's pursuit of independence and national sovereignty. It is significant that Zérapha's article was accompanied by a short notice from the central committee stating that LICA could not verify whether the quoted statements from FLN were correct and that it waited for further explanation from the Provisional

Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA).⁶⁰ During the next two years, however, the situation of Jews in North Africa became an important preoccupation for the central committee, although still relatively little was actually carried out in terms of campaigns, meetings or public statements. When the February 1960 FLN declaration was discussed internally within the central committee, Lecache argued that the organization should not act immediately but eventually discuss the question during a separate meeting.⁶¹ Whether this meeting took place remains unknown, but no public action was taken which was a significant contribution to the passive attitude taken in the face of anti-semitism in Algeria. In an editorial almost a year later, Lecache confronted criticism from the pro-French Algerian paper *Carrefour* regarding the lack of response by the left to anti-Jewish acts in Algeria, in this case the vandalization of a synagogue. Lecache argued that LICA responded to all kind of desecration of synagogues, churches and mosques, but that the organization avoided making collective groups responsible. He added that despite the slogans of the Arab League, the Muslim population in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria was not anti-Jewish.⁶² Again the ambition to create a broad anti-racist platform involving Muslims in Algeria made LICA rather passive towards anti-Jewish tendencies in Algeria even though the organization repeatedly condemned Arab nationalism and anti-Zionist tendencies in Egypt and Morocco. A central committee meeting in July 1961 is symptomatic of the cautious attitude of LICA. The precarious and even dangerous situation of the Jews facing a transition towards an independent Algeria was emphasized during the meeting, but the opinions were divided over whether it was reasonable to intervene or not. Some members argued that LICA must intervene directly with the FLN to protect the Jews, and it was proposed that Lecache should be sent to Switzerland to participate in the negotiation between France and Algeria. However, this was rejected at the meeting, partly because confidence in the FLN was too low and this could disturb negotiations.⁶³ The organization continued to worry about the rights of ethnic and religious minorities in Algeria throughout 1962 in internal meetings with the central committee, but without taking any significant concrete actions.⁶⁴

While LICA was somewhat unsure of how to deal with the Jewish dilemma in Algeria, MRAP continued to emphasize positive relations between Jews and Arabs at the end of the war in the early 1960s. When attacks on a Synagogue, a Jewish cemetery and Jewish magazines took place in Algiers and Oran in December, 1960, MRAP first condemned the attacks but added that the organization “denounced with the same vigour those who exploit a legitimate emotion in order to set the Jews against the Algerian people.”⁶⁵ Such statements implied that the condemnation of anti-Jewish violence ultimately could lead to polarization between Jews and Arabs.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the anti-Jewish acts could not be attributed to Muslim leaders and had nothing to do with FLN, according to the anti-racist organization.⁶⁷ MRAP also reproduced a statement from a

representative of the GPRA, which stated plainly that accusations about FLN's negative politics against the Jews, circulated in the Zionist press in France, could harm the symbiotic relationship between Jewish and Arab communities: "Today, when confidence is needed more than ever before, it was a particularly inappropriate time to sound an irrelevant alarm."⁶⁸ In order to underline the importance of the Jews in the national emancipation, MRAP furthermore published a new letter from a group of Algerian Jewish patriots who denounced the silence of Jews in Algeria as it could be interpreted as an endorsement of Zionist propaganda. Ironically, the authors also emphasized that Jewish culture was part of Algeria by mentioning the popularity of the Algerian-Jewish singer Cheikh Raymond.⁶⁹ The singer was subsequently murdered in Constantine a few weeks after the publication of the article under obscure circumstances, an event which would terrify Jews in Algeria.⁷⁰

Algerian independence and the exodus of Jews

The declaration of independence in July 1962 marked an end to over 132 years of French colonial rule, and Algeria embarked upon a new path of consolidating the nation-state under FLN leadership. The orientation of the new political regime was guided by socialism, nationalism—with strong pan-Arab tendencies—and Islam. The latter had, during the war, been a powerful tool of resistance and now became the cornerstone of Algerian national identity and its popular mobilization. It was accompanied by an authoritarian policy of Arabization of language, which left little room for the multicultural reality of the region.⁷¹ From an anti-racist perspective, Europeans, along with Jews and Berbers, became vulnerable minorities with the consolidation of the Algerian nation, while the Arab population, after over 132 years of colonial oppression and eight years of violent war including massacres and torture, became the rulers.

The reactions of the anti-racist activists to the Jewish exodus during Algerian independence ranged from denial and ignorance to commitment to the Jews. For the LDH, the interest in the new Algeria was rather limited, although the organization paid attention to some individual cases of human rights abuses related to the young nation. These cases for the most part concerned problems with justice and arbitrary arrests related to the war. After the arrests of the former leader of the Algerian revolution Mohamed Boudiaf, together with other militants, the international federation of the LDH protested during a congress in Florence in September 1963.⁷² The organization furthermore noted in the middle of the decade that the legal consequences of the war in Algeria were still present both on the French and Algerian sides, with various cases of injustice with which the LDH assisted.⁷³ A few of these cases also concerned French citizens in Algerian prisons.⁷⁴ The arbitrary arrests in Algeria exposed serious democratic shortcomings of the independent nation. However, such cases did

not inspire any significant reconsideration or thorough discussion of human rights activism in relation to Algeria and/or the exodus of Jews. While condemning the torture and colonial repression of Algerians during the war, in the 1960s, after independence, the LDH did not initiate any significant effort to confront the recent past or campaign in favour of the Jews in Algeria.

MRAP initially gave strong support to the independent nation. When the Evian Accords were signed in March 1962, the Algerian national movement was described positively as an anti-racist and secular revolutionary force by left-wing lawyer Pierre Stibbe in the journal of MRAP. Stibbe, who had also been active in the LDH and was an important figure in the anticolonial left, had been asked by the editorial staff to write about the situation of the Jews. In view of the ongoing emigration from Algeria, which certainly troubled FLN supporters within MRAP, Stibbe argued that they had nothing to worry about:

The Algerian Jews have nothing to fear as Jews in this economic and social revolution, which will enable the Algerian people as a whole to come out of underdevelopment, poverty and illiteracy. Certainly, those among them who have a privileged economic situation will undoubtedly be affected in their privileges, but they are not very numerous, and their fate will not be different from that of the large Muslim landowners; nothing will prevent them from adapting themselves to the new regime, as has been the case in many other countries.⁷⁵

Stibbe furthermore stated that Jews could play an important role in the reconciliation between Arabs and Jews beyond Algerian borders if they participated “without reluctance in the construction of the Algerian nation.”⁷⁶ Although he added that Jews could keep their connection to French culture, such demands of loyalty aligned more broadly with accusations of national disloyalty and betrayal officially directed towards Jews in parts of the Arab world and Communist Eastern Europe at this time. This was obviously a problematic attitude for anti-racist activism, although the purpose was to show opportunities for Jews to stay in Algeria. Indeed, MRAP believed that the Evian Accords in 1962 would enable peaceful relations between various ethnic and religious groups in Algeria.⁷⁷ The pluralistic character of the new nation was a recurring theme when MRAP discussed Algeria in the first half of the 1960s. When Albert Lévy, the future secretary-general of MRAP and an important figure among French human rights activists, travelled to Algeria in 1963, he reported difficulties related to the colonial past and the war. But Lévy was positive overall towards what he perceived as the independent nation’s adoption of an attitude of reconciliation with Europeans and Jews in order to make them stay in Algeria. Lévy also dismissed as of minor importance the political leadership’s hostile political statements towards Israel, and he ended the report with a hopeful tribute to Algeria.⁷⁸ By this time, however, most Jews and Europeans had left the country.

This was the last substantial comment about the political development in Algeria and the nation-building process during the 1960s. MRAP then turned its attention more towards the discrimination of Arabs in France and, at the end of the decade, to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although the organization's attitude towards Israel was critical, MRAP always defended the right of the Jewish state to exist and warned against excessive criticism of the country. The organization also became more aware of the negative aspects of Arab nationalism in general at the end of the 1960s. The bureau of MRAP in Paris published, for example, a statement that economic help was needed in Arab states to prevent religious fanaticism and exacerbated nationalism from the feudal regents.⁷⁹ This critical attitude was not appreciated among more radical organizations on the extreme left, with whom MRAP wanted dialogue. The *Comité étudiant inter-arabe*, which united different Arab student groups in France, attended a meeting of MRAP after the Six-Day War in 1967. The Comité approved of MRAP's criticism of Israel but thought it was not radical enough, and it disliked certain MRAP members' criticism of Nasser.⁸⁰ Many Algerians in France were indeed committed to the Palestinian cause and projected Arab identity politics onto the Arab-Israeli conflict. The pro-FLN associational network *Amicales des Algériens en Europe*, for example, gave its full support to Arabs in Palestine and the Arab states opposed by "imperialist aggressions."⁸¹

LICA advanced the most critical stance towards the development of the new Algerian nation. To assist LICA activists who left Algeria during the process of independence, the organization even initiated an information centre for expatriates.⁸² The national council of LICA in spring 1962 had a particular focus on Jews in North Africa and the invited left-wing politician Charles Hernu proposed that LICA should relaunch the interwar campaign of Jewish-Arab reconciliation in Algeria.⁸³ LICA also tried to re-establish itself in the new Algeria to campaign for positive relations between different ethnic groups. One delegate from the central committee was sent to Algeria for that purpose, without success.⁸⁴ Even if members within the organization apparently still believed in positive relations between Arabs and Jews during the first year of Algerian independence, pessimism was evident within the leadership of LICA. Like MRAP, the organization defended a multi-ethnic state, but indicated in 1963 that it was about to become "purely Arab-Muslim."⁸⁵ While the Algerian war had, in France, had a strong influence on anti-racism in general by exposing human rights abuses on the French side, LICA became increasingly aware of the authoritarian and antisemitic tendencies in the Arab world and of the threat Arab nationalism posed to Jews. Lecache was, however, still careful to distinguish between the Arab leaders and the population when he addressed the anti-Jewish sentiments in Algeria or the Arab world in general.⁸⁶

LICA also continued to pay attention to political tendencies in Algeria during the 1960s by criticizing antisemitic or anti-Israeli tendencies as well as

the suffering of French citizens caused by confiscation of land.⁸⁷ The organization was in this regard in disagreement with the new progressive French left at the end of the 1960s, which had strong sympathies for the Palestinian cause and paid a great deal of attention to Israel's human rights abuses.⁸⁸ Indeed, the Arab-Israeli conflict and combating anti-Zionism both within France and in the Arab world was an important focus for LICA during the 1960s. The new Algerian nation was part of this context, although at the end of the 1960s the focus was more on the Middle East.

Conclusion

The Jews in Algeria were placed in a vulnerable position during the decolonization. Although anti-racist activists' attitudes differed, ranging from ignorance to commitment to the Jews, they did not support the Jews in Algeria with any important campaigns or demonstrations, despite the significant immigration of Algerian Jews to France. While the memory of the Holocaust very much influenced these activists' relationship to the Algerian War of Independence,⁸⁹ those tragic experiences proved to be little help to the Jews who no longer felt safe in Algeria. The attention paid to the situation of Jews in Algeria among the anti-racist organizations depended very much on the ideological orientations of the activists. MRAP campaigned in favour of the Jews in Iraq from 1949–1951 and frequently compared the Iraqi anti-Jewish policy to that of the Nazis. However, under the influence of the French Communist Party, the organization abandoned its support of Jews in Arab lands and became more dedicated to combatting the discrimination of Arabs in France. Although MRAP was interested in the situation of Jews in Algeria and strongly emphasized the group's positive relations to Arabs, the organization largely ignored antisemitism and problems of cohabitation in the wake of growing Algerian nationalism. Instead, MRAP gave voice to relatively marginal, but nevertheless also representative,⁹⁰ attitudes among those Algerian Jews who gave full support to the FLN and accused other Jews of being passive in the process of emancipation from France. Anti-Jewish attacks in Algeria were explained as due to the colonial situation and the fact that both Jews and Muslims were victims of colonialism. The overall tendency of MRAP to downplay antisemitism and emphasize FLN's positive attitude towards Jews, has similarities to MRAP's attitudes towards the antisemitic trials in Eastern Europe in the 1950s.⁹¹ In both cases, political sympathies contributed to a blind spot for antisemitic acts.

The LDH paid less attention to the Jews but warned against Arab nationalism in the region in general. The organization envisioned a multi-ethnic independent Algeria with both Muslims and non-Muslims. However, as a republican organization with universal aspirations, the LDH tended to avoid the ethnic dimension of human rights issues and rarely focused on Jewish experiences when intolerance and authoritarian tendencies were opposed, which was in line with the

French left in general.⁹² LICA was the only one of the three French anti-racist organizations that openly denounced antisemitism in the Arab world and was very much concerned about the situation of Algerian Jews. However, LICA tended to be cautious in its criticism and stressed that intolerance existed on both sides when anti-Jewish incidents took place in Algeria. The organization never actually initiated any significant campaign in support of Algerian Jews, although the organization addressed the question at meetings. The lack of concrete initiative might be explained by the ambition to broaden its activities. Lecache sought a more universal anti-racism that included all forms of discrimination and reached out to Arabs. George Zérapha, within the central committee, represented a significant exception to this tendency. Zérapha, who was born in Algeria to a Jewish family, repeatedly warned against the negative consequences of independence for the Jews in Algeria.

After the country gained independence, all three organizations moved their attention from Algeria to the Arab-Israeli conflict, where Arab national identity politics was articulated in relation to Palestine. Antisemitism, however, continued to develop in Algeria during the 1960s and culminated with the Six-Day War in Israel in 1967, when stereotypes of Jews flourished in this region where very few Jews still lived. These tendencies in Algeria were only addressed and condemned by LICA in the 1960s, while MRAP first endorsed the new Algeria as a socialist nation and a welcoming home for Jews and Europeans as well.

The specific Jewish Algerian experiences of colonialism and decolonization were for decades shrouded in silence.⁹³ In the end the anti-racist organizations did relatively little to oppose this reticence surrounding the silent disappearance of Jewish culture and society from Algeria or from other parts of the Arab world.

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Notes

1. Bensoussan, *Juifs en pays arabes*; Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*.
2. Bensoussan, *Juifs en pays arabes*, 15. For recent works on Jewish-Arab relations in colonial and postcolonial France, see for example, Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood*; Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France*; Valensi, *Juifs et musulmans en Algérie*; Le Foll-Luciani, *Les Juifs Algériens*.
3. Cohen, "Algeria," 459.
4. Laskier, *North African Jewry*, 23. For a more extended discussion on Crémieux Decree, see Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria*.
5. Le Foll-Luciani, *Les Juifs Algériens*, 19.
6. Stora, "L'impossible Neutralité"; Laskier, *North African Jewry*, 334.
7. Sung, "Complex Compatriots."
8. Le Foll-Luciani, "Les juifs d'Algérie."
9. Bensoussan, *Juifs en pays arabes*, 803–5.
10. House, "Anti-Racism in France," 111.
11. Gordon, "Antisemitism, Islamophobia."
12. Naquet, *Pour l'humanité*; Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics*.
13. Boum, "Partners against Anti-Semitism."
14. House, "Anti-Racism in France."
15. Heuman, "Comme les Juifs sous l'occupation," 40.
16. See for example, AL, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal du 7 Juillet 1958", July 7, 1958.
17. Debono, "Le rapprochement judéo-musulman"; Boum, "Partners against Anti-Semitism."
18. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France*, chap. 1.
19. LC, Fonds de la Ligue des droits de l'homme post 1945, ARCH/0103/68, "Congres du cinquanteaire de la Ligue des droits de l'homme (deuxième séance)," June 6, 1948, 36–37.
20. Naquet, *Pour l'humanité*, 237–41.
21. LC, Fonds de la Ligue des droits de l'homme post 1945, ARCH/0103/ 68, "Congres du cinquanteaire de la Ligue des droits de l'homme (deuxième séance)," June 6, 1948, 31.
22. Heuman, "The Challenge."
23. Debono, "Le rapprochement"; Boum, "Partners against Anti-Semitism." Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood*, 100–102.
24. AL, Registre des procès-verbaux des séances du Comité Central de la LICA. "Séance du 28 Mars 1946," Mars 28, 1946, 3.
25. Bernard Lecache. 1949. "Les juifs d'Afrique du Nord et la république d'Israël." *Le droit de vivre*, June 1.
26. Simon, "Iraq," 350–51.
27. "L'Action du MRAP". 1949. *Droit et liberté*, November 25–December 1. See also, "Meetings de protestation du MRAP." 1949, *Droit et liberté*, December 2–8; "Eclatante manifestation d'union contre les pogromes d'Irak." 1949. *Droit et liberté*, December 2–8.
28. See for example, Michel Baron. 1949. "Tous au grand meeting de protestation." *Droit et liberté*, November 25– December 1.
29. "Irak 51." 1951. *Droit et liberté*, Mars 23.
30. See for example, "Sang et pétrole." 1949. *Droit et liberté*, November 18–24.
31. Heuman, "The Challenge."

32. House, "Memory."
33. Cohen, "Algeria," 467.
34. Stora, "L'impossible neutralité," 297.
35. *Ibid.*, 300.
36. Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood*, 175.
37. Cohen, "Algeria," 468; Stora, "L'impossible Neutralité," 299–304.
38. "Une lettre de Jacques Soustelle." 1956. *Le droit de vivre*, June 1.
39. Cole, *Lethal Provocation*.
40. "Une lettre de Jacques Soustelle." 1956. *Le droit de vivre*, June 1.
41. "La réponse de Bernard Lecache." 1956. *Le droit de vivre*, June 1.
42. *Ibid.*
43. AL, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal du 7 Juillet 1958," July 7, 1958.
44. AL, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal du 24 Septembre 1956," September 24, 1956, 5.
45. "La LICA intervient," *Le droit de vivre*, February 1, 1961. See also AL, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal du 16 Janvier 1961," January 16, 1961, 4.
46. AL, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal du 14 Mai," May 14, 1961, 3.
47. "Des Voix s'élèvent pour la fraternité." 1957. *Droit et liberté*, January 31.
48. "Pas de discriminations." 1957. *Droit et liberté*, January 31.
49. "Juifs et musulmans d'Algérie peuvent et doivent s'entendre." 1956. *Droit et liberté*, September 20.
50. "Des Juifs Algériens prennent position." 1957. *Droit et liberté*, Mars 12.
51. See for example, "La réunion du Comité d'Action." 1957. *Droit et liberté*, January 31.
52. "La riposte qui s'imposait." 1958. *Droit et liberté*, April 10.
53. The British magazine *The Spectator* reported about a crowd of 4000 policemen shouting antisemitic slogans in 1958 when Maurice Papon was appointed as prefect of the police in Paris, see Gordon, "World Reactions."
54. Morin, "La LDH "; Agrikoliansky, *La Ligue*, 90–113; Gordon, "Antisemitism, Islamophobia."
55. "Résolution," *Les cahiers des droits de l'homme*, May–July, 1956.
56. House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, 201; Thénault, "La gauche et la décolonisation."
57. *Le Monde*, February 19, 1960.
58. "Le F.L.N. s'adresse aux juifs." 1960. *Droit et liberté*, February.
59. Georges Zerapha. 1960. "Quand le FLN parle aux Juifs algériens." *Le droit de vivre*, Mars 15.
60. "A propos d'une déclaration FLN: mise au point nécessaire." 1960. *Le droit de vivre*, Mars 15.
61. AL, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal du 7 Mars 1960," Mars 7, 1956, 4.
62. Bernard Lecache. 1961. "La Gauche se regroupe pour réclamer une négociation loyale," *Le droit de vivre*, February 1.
63. AL, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal du 3 Juillet 1961," July 3, 1961, 5–7.
64. AL, Réunion du Comité Central, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal de la réunion du Jeudi 24 Mai 1962," May 24, 1962, 3–4 ; "Procès-verbal de la reprise de séance," May 29, 1962, 2–4.
65. "La Guerre exaspère les antagonismes entre les communautés." 1961. *Droit et liberté*, January.
66. See also, "La haine raciale au service de la guerre d'Algérie." 1961. *Droit et liberté*, February.
67. "La Guerre exaspère les antagonismes entre les communautés." 1961. *Droit et liberté*, January.

68. Victor Battino, "Faut-il poser la question juive en Algérie?" 1961. *Droit et liberté*, Mars.
69. Un groupe de patriotes algériens juifs. 1961. "Lettre de Constantine," *Droit et liberté*, May.
70. Stora, "L'Impossible Neutralité Des Juifs d'Algérie," 288 and 305.
71. Benrabah, "Language and Politics."
72. "Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme". 1963. *La Ligue des droits de l'homme: Bulletin National*.
73. "L'Activité juridique de la Ligue." 1966. *La Ligue des droits de l'homme: Bulletin National*, February.
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77. "Deux déclarations du M. R. A. P." 1962. *Droit et liberté*, April 15–May 15.
78. Albert Lévy. 1963. "Algérie 1963." *Droit et liberté*, July-August.
79. AM, Box *Proche-Orient*, J. Dehaussy & J. Malsan, "A propos du conflit Israélo-arabe," 1967.
80. AM, Box *Proche-Orient*, Le Comité Etudiant Inter-Arabe en France, "Communiqué sur le Meeting du MRAP," June 12, 1967; Albert Lévy to Comité Etudiant Inter-Arabe, June 29, 1967.
81. AM, boîte *Proche-Orient*, Direction Centrale des Amicales des Algériens en France, "Communiqué", June 5, 1967.
82. AL, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal de la reprise de séance", May 29, 1962.
83. "Le conseil national de la L.I.C.A. face au problème judéo-arabe en Afrique du Nord", *Le droit de vivre*, 1962, May 15.
84. AL, Réunion du Comité Central, "Procès-verbal du Comité Central du 27 Juin 1962," June 27, 1962; "Procès-verbal du Comité Central du 19 Septembre 1962," September 19 1962.
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87. Bernard Lecache. 1963. "Lettre ouverte au président Ben Bella." *Le droit de vivre*, October 1; "Appel de la LICA pour les Français d'Algérie." 1963. *Le droit de vivre*, November 15; Bernard Lecache. 1963. "Ni Alger ni Rabat ne doivent jouer le jeu de Nasser," *Le droit de vivre*, 15 November; Bernard Lecache. 1965. "Écartez la guerre du Proche-Orient!" *Le droit de vivre*, May 15; "Trois motions voté par le Congrès." 1965. *Le droit de vivre*, May 15.
88. Gordon, Immigrants & Intellectuals.
89. House, "Memory."
90. Le Foll-Luciani, *Les Juifs Algériens*.
91. Heuman, "The Challenge," 504; Gordon, "Antisemitism, Islamophobia," 232.
92. Thénault, "La gauche et la décolonisation."
93. Stora, *Les trois exils*.

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