

Contemporary Antisemitism in the Political Discourse in France

On July 16, 1995, in a historical speech at the memorial for the Jewish victims of the Vél d'Hiv roundup of 1942 in Paris,¹⁴ President Jacques Chirac confessed the role of France in the tragic fate of its Jewish population during the German occupation and for deporting thousands of Jews to the death camps. After decades in which French leaders firmly refused to admit that French authorities had taken part in the systematic persecution, it took one brave leader standing in front of a small crowd of Jewish leaders and survivors of the death camps to state the following, marking an important milestone in the French contemporary memory discourse:

These dark hours forever sully our history and are an insult to our past and our traditions . . . yes, the criminal folly of the occupiers was seconded by the French, by the French state . . . France, the homeland of the Enlightenment and of the rights of man, a land of welcome and asylum, on that day committed the irreparable . . . breaking its word, it handed those who were under its protection over to their executioners . . . we owe them [the Jewish victims] an everlasting debt (Simons, 1995).¹⁵

Twenty-five years after, on July 16, 2020, France commemorated 75 years to the Vél d'Hiv roundup. In his commemoration speech, Emmanuel Macron, the president of France, stated that “on July 16 and 17, 1942, more than three thousand Jews were arrested. By the French, by the French State. Because they were Jews. Over eight thousand were detained at the Vél d'Hiv before being deported to Auschwitz. Never forget” (Algemeiner Staff, 2020).

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Despite Macron's honest plea to never forget, an alarming rise in antisemitic incidents in France today illustrates a rather different reality. The number of antisemitic attacks in France in recent years implies that rhetoric of Holocaust memory in Europe does not necessarily correlate with facts on the ground. Moreover, since the 2000s, a clear rise in domestic antisemitism linked to global Islamic terrorism has been observed, manifested by attacks against synagogues and the Jewish population. One of the most horrifying cases that shocked the French republic in recent years was the March 2018 murder of Mireille Knoll, an 85 year-old Holocaust survivor who was stabbed to death in her apartment in Paris by two men who then set her body on fire (Kantor Center, 2019, p. 67). Other tragic and shocking cases of antisemitism in France include the torture and murder of Ilan Halimi in 2006; the Toulouse school massacre in 2012, in which four were murdered; the attack on the Hypercacher kosher grocery in Paris in 2015, culminating in the death of four people (World Jewish Congress, n.d.a) and the murder of 65 year-old Sarah Halimi in 2017.¹⁶

“The most extreme cases of violence against Jews in 21st century France (and Europe) were motivated, at least partially, by jihadist ideology which is inherently antisemitic,” argues historian and sociologist Günther Jikeli (2018, p. 299; see also Taguieff, 2004; Krämer, 2006; Tibi 2012). Jikeli asserts that that most of the peaks of antisemitic incidences since the year 2000 correlate to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (in addition to other variables). “It seems that heightened tensions and violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict trigger some antisemitic acts in addition to an already high level of antisemitic incident . . . Antisemites often do not distinguish between the Israeli government, Israelis, and ‘the Jews.’” Furthermore, he cites that “the demonization of Israel becomes a demonization of all Jews and lowers the threshold to act upon negative attitudes toward Jews” (Jikeli, 2018, p. 303).

Background

Jews in France today represent less than 1% of the country's total population, around 450,000 Jews out of 65 million people (DellaPergola & Staetsky, 2020). They constitute the main Jewish community in Europe and the third largest Jewish community in the world, after the US and Israel. More than half of the Jewish population in France lives in Paris and its suburbs, followed by relatively large communities in Marseilles, Lyons, Toulouse,

Nice, Strasbourg, Grenoble, Metz, and Nancy. After 1945, a large number of North African Jews immigrated to France, as part of the French withdrawal from its colonies. Their arrival immediately doubled the size of France's Jewish community. Muslim immigrants also began arriving in France in parallel to the North African Jewish immigration. In general, until the beginning of the 1980s, the two communities—Jewish and Muslim—often lived harmoniously; this changed, however, due to failed attempts to fully integrate the Muslim community into French society. In addition, relations between the two communities were constantly tense due to continuous friction and violence between Israelis and Palestinians, especially during the First and Second Intifadas (World Jewish Congress, n.d.a).

The small percentage of Jews in France does not seem to correlate with the dramatic increase of antisemitic attacks against them in recent years. Researchers claim that antisemitic acts in France have reached a level that “has not been seen since World War I” (Zawadzki, 2017, pp. 295–296). According to a survey conducted by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in France and published in early 2020, 70% of French Jews say they have been victims of at least one antisemitic incident in their lifetime; 64% have suffered antisemitic verbal attacks at least once; 23% have been targets of physical violence at least once; and 10% stated they were attacked several times. Moreover, 73% of the French public and 72% of Jews consider antisemitism a problem that affects all of French society (AJC, 2020a).

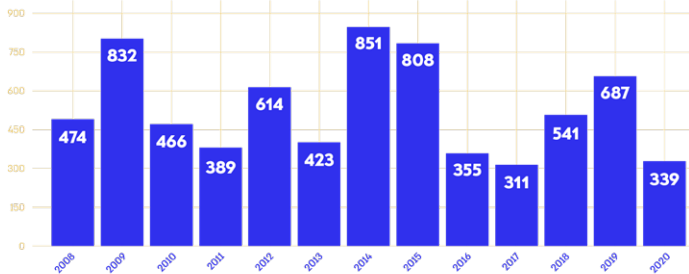
The last public opinion poll on antisemitism conducted in France by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in 2019 sought to examine the extent to which French citizens agree with 11 antisemitic statements or stereotypes (see Figure 8). It found that 32% of respondents agreed with the statement that “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the country in which they live”; 29% expressed sympathy with the statement that “Jews have too much power in the business world economy”; and 31% agreed with the statement that “Jews still talk too much about what happened in the Holocaust” (ADL, 2019).

Figure 8. ADL Poll on Antisemitism in France



Note. From ADL, *ADL Global 100: An Index of Anti-semitism, France, 2019*.

The Kantor Center for the Study of Antisemitism stated in a recent annual report that “the number of recorded antisemitic incidents in France continued to rise in 2019, with a 27 percent increase over the dramatic rise of 74 percent in 2018” (Kantor Center, 2020, p. 94). In addition, the official data of the French Interior Ministry (2020) and the Service de protection de la communauté juive [Service of protection of the Jewish community] (SPCJ) show that most of the racist hate crimes recorded in 2019 were antisemitic in origin (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Overview of Antisemitic Incidents in France 2008–2020

Notes. Data adapted from European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Antisemitism: Overview of Antisemitic Incidents Recorded in the European Union 2009–2019*, 2020, p. 42; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Antisemitism: Overview of Data Available in the European Union 2008–2018*, 2019; and Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive, *Communiqué Antisémitisme en France*, 2020.

According to the Kantor Center (2020), the attacks peaked during the anti-government protests of the Yellow Vests (*Gilets Jaunes*)¹⁷ throughout 2019–2020, with 160 incidents documented during these protests out of a total of 687 antisemitic incidents (Kantor Center, 2020, p. 95). Vincent Duclert, who researches antisemitism in France at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, has argued that these protests provided “a new space for different kinds of antisemitism to come together: from the extreme right and extreme left, but also from radical Islamist or anti-Zionist groups, and some types of social conservatives” (Williamson, 2019). One of the victims of these protests was French Jewish philosopher and writer Alain Finkielkraut, who was attacked with antisemitic remarks such as “dirty Jew,” “dirty Zionist,” and slogans like “you’re a hater, you’re going to die, you’re going to hell,” “France is ours” and “return to Tel Aviv” while walking on the street in Paris (Kantor Center, 2020, p. 96; see Haaretz, 2019). The antisemitic events related to the Yellow Vests reflected a much larger increase in attacks against Jews, from desecrating Jewish graves with antisemitic inscriptions and swastikas, to publicly harassing Jews on the streets, and targeting Jews in the public, social, and political discourses (Kantor Center, 2020, p. 97).¹⁸

The COVID-19 crisis also contributed to the radicalization in anti-Jewish sentiment. In an interview conducted in the *Jerusalem Post* with Robert Ejnes, executive director of the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France (CRIF), conspiracy theories implicating Jews in the spread of the virus have been numerous, especially on different social media platforms (Tercatin, 2020). As a result, Jewish institutions have prepared an “exit strategy” for synagogues, schools, and Jewish facilities due to growing concerns of the rise in antisemitism connected to the economic crisis, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although a report from 2020 claimed a drop of 50% in antisemitic incidents from 2019, reports of physical assaults remained about the same even though France was in lockdowns for long periods of time throughout 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic (SPCJ, 2020).¹⁹

Legislation Against Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial

France does not criminalize denial of the Holocaust. According to Bazyler (n.d.), the French law rather tends to “repress any racist, anti-Semitic or xenophobic acts.” In Law No. 90-615 of July 13, 1990, (article 9), known as the “Gayssot Act,” it is stated that it is an offense to question the existence and size of what was defined as “crimes against humanity” in the London Charter of 1945 and on the basis of the Nuremberg Trials (1945–1946). Moreover, it is stated in the criminal code that “any discrimination based on belonging or not belonging to an ethnic group, a nation, a race or a religion is prohibited.”

As for the connection between anti-Zionism and or anti-Israel positions and their relation to antisemitism, the French National Assembly decided to adopt the working definition of antisemitism of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance [IHRA] (2016) in December 2019 and defined anti-Zionism as antisemitism (Harkov, 2019). In an interview, French philosopher Finkelkraut referred to the rise of antisemitism among the far left combined with the rise of radical Islamism in the country:

In France, it [antisemitism] is part of the extreme Left and a growing part of the population with a migration background . . . it is particularly worrying that the extreme left defends radical, antisemitic Islam for two reasons: ideologically, because for them, the Muslims are the new Jews, the disenfranchised;

but also for tactical reasons, because today there are many more Muslims than Jews in France. So, left Islamism also has a future, and I'm afraid of that . . . I was actually the object of aggression with a proven antisemitic character. But I was not called “dirty Jew” but “dirty Zionist shit.” *The peculiarity of contemporary antisemitism is that it uses the language of anti-racism. Because of the existence of Israel, the Jews are now considered racists. “Filthy Jew”—that was a morally disgraceful term. “Dirty racist” that is highly moral today* [emphasis added] (Weinthal, 2019).

Antisemitism and the Political Discourse

The political realm serves as fertile ground for antisemitism to flourish. Political parties are also using it as a tool to strengthen political interests and agendas. In France, this issue seems to extend across the political spectrum. Prof. Dina Porat, the head of the Kantor Center for Antisemitism, stated in 2018 that “the normalization and mainstreaming of antisemitism in public forums, debates and discussions is manifested in all media channels. Antisemitism is no longer an issue confined to the activity of the far left, far right and radical Islamists triangle—it has mainstreamed and become an integral part of life [emphasis added]” (Kantor Center, 2019, p. 6). The 2017 annual report of the Kantor Center referred to this phenomenon from a European perspective and clearly stated:

The recent strengthening of the extreme right in a number of European countries was accompanied by slogans and symbols which remind, not only the Jewish population, of the 1930s, despite the significant differences between the two periods. The electoral and political achievements of the extreme right should not distract attention from the fact that they are coupled with the rise in leftist antisemitism, that supports radical Muslim anti-Israeli attitudes expressed in antisemitic terms such as in the BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] and Antifa movements, and certainly in the UK Labor party led by Jeremy Corbin. *The more time passes by, and World War Two and the Holocaust turn to be a distant past, the more the commitment towards Israel*

and Jewish security weakens, especially among the post-war generations [emphasis added] (Kantor Center, 2018, p. 6).

The contemporary political discourse in France serves as an example to understand these phenomena in a broader European perspective.

Antisemitism in the Far Right

France's National Rally party (*Rassemblement National*)²⁰ is known for its populist, nationalist, conservative, anti-migration and Eurosceptic positions, as well as being antisemitic and having a tradition of Holocaust denial, particularly during the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the party (Taub, 2020).²¹ His daughter and the party's successor since 2011, Marine Le Pen, has tried to shape a more moderate political strategy and managed to enter the mainstream political discourse in France.²² Le Pen also tried to reshape her father's extreme anti-Jewish positions, by moving away from being an anti-Jewish party to transforming into a "champion of French Jews" (Taub, 2020) and assuming the role of their "protector."

Reality, however, shows a more complex picture. When carefully examining the party's discourse and rhetoric in recent years, it is evident that antisemitism is still very much alive in the party, even if expressed differently than before. Taub (2020) explained this exact shift:

Experts say the National Front's shift may be intended more as a message to non-Jewish voters looking for moral cover in supporting a party that vilifies their primary sources of fear and anger: Muslims and immigrants. The National Front has long been widely viewed in France as toxic, but by declaring itself a shield for French Jews, *it may have found an effective way to allow many voters to justify breaking a taboo. That reflects a concept known as "moral license."* Framing the party as a champion of one minority enables voters to justify supporting its agenda in suppressing another [emphasis added].

Positioning themselves as "friends of the Jewish community" and as "allies of Israel" and using this "perfect" tactic to safely and quietly enter the mainstream discourse—members of the party have used their momentum to spread their radical, racist, and anti-migrant positions from "the inside." This tactic has been mainly characterized by "showing vigorous support

for Israel and boasting about their ties with its ruling party and leader over the past decade, while not forgetting to mention their visits to Jerusalem” (Papirblat, 2019).

One of the main characteristics of the antisemitic rhetoric of the National Rally is its constant and dangerous attempt to create a new national narrative by distorting historical facts (historical revisionism) about the responsibility and active role of Vichy’s France in the extermination of French Jews during World War II, or by downplaying the severity of its role in the atrocities. For example, during an interview in which Marine Le Pen referred to the Vél d’Hiv roundup in occupied Paris of 1942, she claimed that France “wasn’t responsible” (Nossiter, 2020). Le Pen argued that “if there was responsibility, it is with those who were in power at the time, it is not with France. France has been mistreated, in people’s minds, for years.” She also added that children in France have been taught that “they have all the reasons in the world to criticize it, to only see its darkest historical aspects. I want them to be proud of being French.”

An anti-immigration agenda and national Eurosceptic stances have been “key factors” (Kantor Center, 2018, p. 13) in the success of right-wing extreme parties in Europe, such as the National Rally. According to the Kantor Center (2018), immigrants who arrived in large numbers during 2014–2015, mainly from the Middle East and Afghanistan, generated a “public discourse concerning the presence of immigrants.” More specifically, “the rightist parties that declare pro-Israel and pro-Jewish stances hope for an alliance with the Jewish communities and Israel against the immigrants, most of whom are Muslims, but such an alliance cannot materialize: most of the Muslims are moderates, against whom no ill wish is being harbored: on the contrary, they are considered by Israel and the Jewish communities as potential allies” (Kantor Center, 2018, p. 13).

Historically and still evident today, strong anti-immigration sentiments and policies often result in visible antisemitism in the political sphere as well as in an increase of antisemitic incidents and sentiments among the public (see Ghosh, 2012; Miller, 2020; Schwartz, 2019). Marie Le Pen herself even let her veil slip, revealing what the Union of Jewish Students in France (UEJF) has characterized as the true antisemitic nature of the National Rally (UEJF, 2020). In response to an interview in which Enrico Macias, the renowned French Jewish figure and singer, said he would immigrate to

Israel if Le Pen won the next scheduled French presidential elections, Marie Le Pen tweeted that it was “another good reason to vote for me in 2022!” (See Figure 10) (Liphshiz, 2020).

Figure 10. Antisemitic Tweet by Marie Le Pen



Note. From Marie Le Pen @MLP_officiel, Twitter, October 11, 2020.

Aside from the historical perils of which the French Jewish community is painfully aware when one community is named as “other” or “not French,” often the anti-Muslim agenda of nationalist parties such as the National Rally also results in targeting the practices of observant Jewish lifestyles as well. For example, Nicolas Bay of the National Rally, currently serving as a member of the European Parliament, criticized Ecolo, a far-left Belgian political party, for supporting the right of Muslim women to wear the hijab (Muslim headscarf) and for the Muslim community to be able to ritually slaughter meat (*halal*). This normalized targeting of social practices of other religions by nationalist leaders could easily shift to orthodox Jews

and the practice of married orthodox women to cover their hair as well as the community's observance of *kashrut*.²³

Despite having publicly portrayed themselves as having changed their approaches to the Jewish community and Israel, some elected representatives from the National Rally cannot break their old habits of perpetuating Jew-hatred and often choose to do so directly with the public through social media. For example, Nicolas Bay has used his Facebook account and professional platform to perpetuate the conspiracy that George Soros²⁴ has “infiltrated” the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) by purposefully funding multiple European NGOs and establishing a “network” of 22 judges that are directly linked to him, to “impose an open society” (Bay, 2020). The day after this post was made, Bay continued to perpetuate the trope of Soros as a puppet master of the ECHR, once again labeling him as a globalist, in an interview with *Valeurs Actuelles* magazine (Lejeune, 2020). In the interview, Bay stated that

The project claimed by George Soros is that of a chemically pure globalized liberalism, the global society ruled by judges, which recognizes only uprooted and interchangeable individuals; free commercial exchange and the free movement of people becoming the cardinal values of society.

In addition to stirring up nationalist fears of EU institutions, Bay uses George Soros as a trope to suggest a wider well-funded “Jewish” infiltration of the EU institutions with the goal of perpetuating a conspiratorial globalist agenda (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Antisemitic References to “Jewish” Infiltration of EU Institutions by Nicolas Bay of the National Rally



Note. From Nicolas Bay, Facebook, February 20, 2020.

Prior to these statements, in March 2019, Bay came under fire when images surfaced on social media of his assistant dressed as a caricature of an Orthodox Jew, featuring claw-like hands and deformed facial expressions (see Figure 12). Bay responded by dismissing the accusation of antisemitism in the ranks of the National Rally, saying, “it was a disguise, a mere joke made in bad taste privately” (JTA, 2019).

Figure 12. Caricature of an Orthodox Jew by Assistant of National Rally Member Nicolas Bay



Collaborateur de Nicolas Bay, M. Guillaume Pradoura, un aide à l'Assemblée nationale, posant en 2013 en costume d'un Juif Haredi. (screenshot news.konbini.com via JTA)

Note. From JTA, An antisemitic caricature: The polemical photo of the parliamentary assistant of Nicolas Bay, May 18, 2019.

Antisemitism in the Far Left and Radical Islam

Antisemitism in the far left political spectrum in France has also increased in recent years. According to the Kantor Center's 2018 annual report, "conspiracy theories catalyze traditional antisemitism, anti-Zionism and combines anti-system and anti-global trends, manifesting itself in parts of the Yellow Vests movement," (Kantor Center, 2018, p. 14). For example, Sébastien Jumel, a representative of the French Communist Party for Seine-Maritime in the French National Assembly and participant of the Economic Affairs Committee (French National Assembly, n.d.a), made multiple references to the common antisemitic trope of the Rothschild family as rich bankers, insinuating that they are disconnected and simultaneously exploit the common Frenchman (see Figure 13). Jumel actively promoted these statements via both of his official social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook during the Yellow Vests protests.

Figure 13. Antisemitic Facebook Posts and Tweets by Sébastien Jumel, a Representative of the French Communist Party



Note. From Sébastien Jumel @sebastienjumel, Twitter, December 5, 2019.



Sébastien Jumel

December 2, 2019 · 🌐

...

WE DONT BEAT ON RETIRED

Three days away from the mobilization against a counter-reform of pension that threatens our system of retirement by distribution, our expression with Nicolas Langlois, mayor of Dieppe and Laurent Jacques, mayor of Tréport, my substitute. Retirees are not the golden generation, employees are not privileged.

" They are Dieppe, the Dieppe territory, the Tréport, the Bresle Valley, the employees of the industry, the fishermen, the garbage workers and all those whose painful work reduces healthy life expectancy after 60 years, railway workers, teachers threatened to have their pensions melted, the precarious jobs of social bond, such as accompanying students with disabilities, Atsem, childcare workers, hospital workers and Ehpad who live off inside a hospital crisis ruled since more than

10 years by the rule to calculate, all agents of the Public Service whose pension plan is

to link with wages and careers that are little evolving, they are Dieppe, the Dieppe territory, the Tréport, Eu, the Bresle Valley, these women whom the reversion protects today and who would be tomorrow in French society with this Macron reform even more unequal than men.

They are Dieppe, dieppe territory, Tréport, Eu la Vallée de la Bresle, this patchwork of citizens attached as an overwhelming majority of

French and French, to this WELL COMMON that is our system of retirement by distribution which France inherited from the fighting of the Resistance has made the choice.

A system that connects generations and provides opportunities for young people to access to a job when their elders start a new life.

They are not heirs or bankers at Rothschild and we would like to make them look privileged!

It's a prank, it's desinformation deployed to divide the people because the real privileged are those who don't need a supportive retirement system - as they don't need either APL or unemployment insurance for that matter - to sink golden days after 60 years, because they can count on big capital and a tax policy (ISF super pressure, flat tax...) that treated them. They have no social burden and government on March unloaded them from what they considered a " tax burden " immediately after Macron's election.

The fall in pensions that this reform would bring, the increase in the duration of contributions, the increase in retirement age, the end of a system that puts solidarity at the heart to clear the horizon for each and every one of a capitalization model are not a concern for the true privileged. On the other hand, it's good

a major concern for an overwhelming majority of French women.

In Dieppe, in Tréport in Eu in the Bresle Valley, as in the National Assembly, alongside union activists, we are in resistance against this policy of injustice whose pension reform project is the brilliant symbol, this policy that divides deeply France, explodes social, tax and territorial inequality, weakens schools, turns their back on the climate challenge, does not defend the real economy, refuses dialogue, fractures democracy and pushes the French people on the streets, on the rounds - points and on the boulevards.

In Dieppe, in dieppe territory, in Tréport, in Eu, in the Bresle Valley to defend the municipality that takes care, in the Assembly to defend the Republic that takes care."

🔗 See original · Rate this translation



Note. From Sébastien Jumel, Facebook, December 2, 2019.

Similar to during the Yellow Vest protests, significant social tensions that flared up in the summer of 2020 around the issue of race and police brutality also devolved into public antisemitism. A demonstration of 10,000 strong protesting the death of George Floyd at the hands of the police in the United States and organized by the French Adama Traore movement in solidarity with Black Lives Matter featured chants of “dirty Jews!” (Valeurs Actuelles, 2020) and “Jewish whores,” alongside chants alleging Israel to be the “laboratory of police violence.” The police reportedly had to block demonstrators from proceeding beyond the Place de la République in Paris. In July 2020, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the founder of the democratic socialist party La France Insoumise [“France unbowed”],²⁵ referred to an age-old antisemitic trope that Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus,²⁶ when asked about police violence during an interview on the French BFM-RTL TV news channel (see Figure 14). When Mélenchon called for normalcy and criticized the state of police violence as being totally out of control, the anchor asked if police should be expected not to react to violence by protesters and “stay put like Jesus on the cross” (Oster, 2020). Mélenchon answered, “I don’t know about Jesus being on the cross. But I know who put him there. Apparently, he was put there by his compatriots” (Oster, 2020).

Figure 14. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the Founder of the Democratic Socialist Party La France Insoumise, Referring to Antisemitic Trope



Note. From BFM TV, Interview with Jean-Luc Mélenchon, July 15, 2020.

This was not the only antisemitic incident attributed by the leader of the far left party. Not limited to leaders of the far right, Mélenchon has expressed historical revisionist positions and has denied France's past during World War II and its active role in transporting the Jews to the concentration camps, tantamount to Holocaust denial. In 2018, Mélenchon attacked President Macron for admitting that the Vichy government was indeed the French government during the war, and that France—and not the Nazis—was responsible for deporting its Jews. Mélenchon stated that it is “totally unacceptable” (Haaretz, 2018) to say that “France, as a people, as a nation, is responsible for this crime”:

Never, at any moment, did the French choose murder and antisemitic criminality. Those who were not Jewish were not all, and as French people, guilty of the crime that was carried out at the time! On the contrary, through its resistance, its fight against the [German] invader and through the reestablishment of the republic when the [Germans] were driven out of the territory, the French people, the French people proved which side they were actually on . . . it is not in Mr. Macron's power to attribute an identity of executioner to all of the French that is not theirs. No, no, Vichy is not France! (Haaretz, 2018)

In addition to the above, in March 2020 the French far left party also expressed solidarity with the former leader of the British Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, and attacked leaders of the Jewish community in France, including the CRIF, as well as in London for accusing Corbyn of antisemitism and organizing a campaign against him, as part of what Mélenchon referred to as “pro-Likud networks” (Sitbon, 2019). Mélenchon added that he would “never give in” to Jewish groups. Similarly, Mélenchon has characterized a Jewish member of the French assembly, Meyer Habib, as a “friend of Netanyahu's” as a way of smearing him and launched criticism against Israel in an unrelated incident when Habib criticized Mélenchon's statements on the murder of Sara Halimi (see Figure 15).²⁷

Members of La France Insoumise have also come under fire for defending and failing to call out antisemites who share a progressive agenda with the party (see D.D., 2017; European Jewish Congress, 2017). Mélenchon had defended his party's deputy, Daniele Obono, for supporting Houria Bouteldja,

a spokeswoman of the Indigenous Party of the Republic, an extreme left anti-colonialist party that is not currently represented in the French National Assembly (n.d.b). Obono characterized Bouteldja as “a comrade” in the fight against racism, even though she had described Jews in 2015 as “shields and fighters for French imperialism and its Islamophobic policy” and had posted a photo of graffiti that read, “Zionists to the gulag” on social media. When questioned if Bouteldja’s statements were antisemitic, Obono responded that she did not know.

Figure 15. Jean-Luc Mélenchon Referring to Jewish Member of the French Assembly as a Friend of Israel’s Prime Minister Netanyahu



Note. From Jean-Luc Mélenchon, @JLMelehcon. Twitter, January 21, 2020.