Distancing from Israel? An Inquiry of British and French Young Jews Self-Identification Process with the Jewish State
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MA Middle Eastern Studies

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Word Count: 20,275

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Abstract:

For 20 years, studies have been underlining a decrease in the attachment of young diaspora Jews with the State of Israel. While a broad majority of young Jews supports the existence of a Jewish state in Palestine, an increasing minority develops an opposition to Israeli policies, especially concerning the occupation of Palestinian Territories. As Jewish organisations advocating for Palestinian rights flourish in the Western world, where the Jewish diaspora is in majority located, the process according to which young Jews are increasingly distancing themselves from an Israeli-centred Jewish identity seems important to inquire. Indeed, growing diaspora support for a just political solution to the Middle East conflict might have empiric repercussions on the Israeli government. Therefore, this thesis seeks to inquire the identification process of young progressive Jews in France and Britain relating to the Zionist project, and aims at answering the following question: What drives critical French and British Jewish youth's identification choices in the construction of a non-Israel centric identity?

This paper argues that young Jews self-identify in a nexus between the Jewish community, overwhelmingly Zionist, and external norms and values of human rights and social justice, which creates conflicting dynamics. When left-wing values out-weight the community's narrative, it creates or strengthens a feeling of alienation among progressive Jewish youth, that is slowly turning into criticism and distancing from the State of Israel. This youth, therefore, seeks to navigate new spaces of identification and revive a Jewish identity able to reconcile this internal struggle.

To demonstrate so, this thesis will firstly conceptualise identity and discuss historical debates on Jewish identity. It will then analyse the distancing hypothesis, and the debates it created among scholars about its accuracy and potential factors. In the last two chapters, it will study the self-identification process of four young British and French Jews advocating for Palestinian rights. Through life-long interviews dealing with their attitudes towards a Zionist Jewish identity, this paper underlines the dynamics characterising their progressive alienation from the State of Israel: a primary discomfort, followed by a de-Zionification process, creating important fractures with friends, families, and their Jewishness, and finally the identification with a revived diasporic identity, able to reconcile Jewishness and anti-Zionism.

Introduction:

On May 13, 2021, 93 American Jews, from 8 different schools of Judaism, published a letter in the Forward, one of the most prominent Jewish American newspaper, starting as follow: "Blood is flowing in the streets of the Holy Land, for those of us for whom Israel has represented hope and justice, we need to give ourselves permission to watch, to acknowledge what we see, to mourn and to cry. And then, to change our behaviour and demand better." Reacting to the violence flare-up in Palestine between May 6 and 21, 2021, the rabbinical students accused Israel of apartheid and urged American Jews to rethink their unconditional support for the state (Tracy, 2021). Like many other pieces written by Jewish intellectuals during the latest Israeli war on Gaza, the letter draws a parallel between the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the Palestinian struggle, arguing that while Jewish institutions engaged with structural racism after George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, they systematically fail to address racism and injustice when it comes to Israel and the Palestinians (Cramer, 2021). The latest violence, however, led a new generation of connected left-wing activists to shift the narrative from a national conflict between competing parties to a straightforward matter of racial justice, as indicated by numerous protest placards titling "Palestine Can't Breathe" or "Palestinian Lives matter" (Freedland, 2021). Framed that way, the Palestinian liberation struggle attracted new supporters, filling up social media timelines and encouraging thousands of people to participate in protests, both in Europe and the US. Noticing the slow appropriation of #FreePalestine in global popular culture through celebrities' support, Freedland asserted that the movement might join #MeToo or #BlackLivesMatter as a global social movement (ibid.). While the columnist's statement might be optimistic regarding the current climate of tension surrounding Palestinian activists and their supporters, a new dynamic seems important to notice: the rise of new Jewish voices condemning Israel's actions.

While Jewish critics of Israel, or anti-Zionist Jews, are not a new phenomenon, their activism seems to be growing. Writing in the Guardian, Arielle Angel argues that while her first Palestinian solidarity rally as a Jew in 2014 left her with a great feeling of loneliness, she notices an increasing presence of Jewish voices that dramatically change the protests' dynamics in 2021 (Angel, 2021). The possibility of a slow distancing of a part of the Jewish diaspora youth from Israel and its policies has raised great concerns among Jewish scholars in the last two decades. According to Rosner et al., all data points toward a distancing of young Jews: they say to be less emotionally attached to the state, less proud of it, or less excited about it than older generations (2011: 288). They are also less comfortable to self-identify as Zionist or pro-Israel, or with the idea of a Jewish state (ibid.: 289). The explaining factors have been debated at length: a natural life-cycle, the dramatic increase of inter-marriage, a simple rise of critical mind among a highly educated youth or various historical and political factors (Waxman, 2017a, Sasson et al. 2010, Beinart, 2010). But, whatever the advanced reasons for this potential distancing from Israel, the dynamic created a great deal of

anxiety among Israeli officials and Zionist scholars, as if confirmed, it will have great consequences on the Jewish state in the coming years (see Rosner et al., 2011).

Indeed, scholars actively recognised the role diaspora may play in conflict resolution in their homeland (see Shain, 2002, Shain and Cofman Wittes, 2002, Smith and Stares, 2007). They have analysed both the role diaspora might play, either as a peace-wrecker or peace-maker, or both at the same time, and the degree of influence they might possess over policy-makers. Dov Waxman (2017b) inquired the American Jewish diaspora's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict outcomes, arguing that it does not represent a politically homogenous group and therefore acts both as peace-wrecker and peace-maker, but more importantly that American Jews have rather little influence over Israeli policy-maker in regards to the Palestinians. Although Waxman acknowledges that American Jews influence the American foreign policy towards Israel, he seems to downplay the role of public opinion in policy-making. This piece however asserts that the Jewish diaspora public opinion in regards to Israeli policies, and particularly the ways in which Jews analyse and voice criticism towards the state, might play a greater role in the conflict outcomes than Waxman presumes (Hagai et al., 2013: 288). Indeed, while Israel no longer depends on American Jewry's financial support for its survival, it still relies on its alliances with the United States and the EU, both for power balancing in the region and for its legitimacy as a Western democracy. Indeed, The State of Israel and its supporters spend millions of dollars on numerous educational and experiential programs such as Birthright Israel and Masa Israel to strengthen diaspora ties with the Jewish state, organise Jewish summer camps in which children learn Zionist anthems, or visit extermination camps and then Israel to observe Memorial or Independence Day (Tracy, 2021). Those efforts highlight the importance of the continued support of the diaspora, a support that is therefore interesting to inquire. Indeed, western Jewish communities' public opinion on Israel has a direct influence over their national foreign policy towards the Jewish State, and hereby over Israel's most important alliances. A decreased support from the Jewish community could lead to more actions taken by western democracies towards Palestinians' rights.

While the lived realities of the Palestinian people are becoming increasingly mediated due to the advent of smartphones and the new possibilities of pictures and videos dissemination on social media, the conversation among Jewish western communities on their supposed unconditional support for Israel has been relaunched. In their letter, American rabbinical students described what they lived as a "spiritual crisis' watching the violence unleashing in Gaza and numerous Palestinian and Israeli cities (Cramer, 2021). Others have spoken about an "identity crisis" to depict the position of young Jews facing Palestinian sufferings (Dias and Graham, 2021).

This thesis inquires the identification dynamics of young Jews with the State of Israel. It identifies two vectors: identifying internally and being identified externally. Jewish youth constructs their identity at the interaction of how they understand themselves to be, according to both narratives internal to the Jewish community, and external ones, and how they are identified by

others, again within and outside the community. Those two vectors of identification can come together or create tensions, and the individual evolves within those interactions.

This research project aims at analysing the supposed centrality of the State of Israel in British and French young Jews' identity. In doing so, it seeks to offer an insight into the dynamics of identification of young diaspora Jews aspiring to decentre their Jewishness from the hegemonic Zionist narrative, and to find new meanings matching their individual values. In doing so, it aims at answering the following question: What drives critical French and British Jewish youth's identification choices in the construction of a non-Israel centric identity?

This paper argues that young diaspora Jews self-identify in a nexus between the Jewish community, overwhelmingly Zionist, and external norms and values of human rights and social justice, creating conflicting dynamics. When left-wing values become more important than the community narrative, it creates or strengthens a feeling of alienation among progressive Jewish youth, that is slowly turning into criticism and distancing from the State of Israel. This youth therefore seeks to navigate new spaces of identification and to revive a Jewishness able to reconcile this internal struggle.

To demonstrate so, this paper firstly discusses historical debates over Jewish identity. After a short discussion on the conceptualisation of identity, it offers an insight into the different self-identification narratives constructed by the Jewish people overtime and their political consequences on the issue of national self-determination. Then, it deals with the distancing hypothesis, according to which young Jews are increasingly distancing themselves from the State of Israel, and evaluates different factors explaining it in contemporary France and Britain. This discussion evolves in the third chapter in an analysis of young Jews' identification process between the universal and the community, looking at the discomfort and alienation perceived by progressive youth, and the difficulties in finding appropriate spaces for self-identification. Finally, this thesis inquires the process of identification within the community, between losing and reshaping one's Jewishness aligned with individual values.

Methodology:

Giddens talks about self-identity as a "reflexive project of the self", that consists of sustaining but constantly revising biographical narratives (1992: 5). Indeed, aligned with Connelly and Clandinin, this thesis approaches individuals as storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied-lives (1990: 2). In other words, individuals forge their life through a narrative that constitutes their identity, both in the ways they understand themselves to be, and in which they project themselves socially (Baddeley et al., 2007: 177). Therefore, to offer a comprehensive picture of Jewish youth identification dynamics with the State of Israel, this thesis uses the qualitative method of narrative inquiry. The field is mainly divided into two approaches when it comes to analysing identity through narratives: biographical and interaction-oriented approaches. Biographical analysts posit that the process of identity building has for objective the production of a coherent self, and therefore see the process of life story-telling as aiming to achieve integration through different mechanisms (De Fina, 2015: 352). Interactionists, by contrast, focus on the process of identity construction itself, on the strategies used by narrators and audiences to achieve, contest and reaffirm specific identities. In doing so, interactionists reinstate the inherently social character of identities (ibid.). This thesis adopts the second approach to focus on the interaction dynamics of youth's identification processes. Indeed, it seeks to analyse the different influences orientating Jewish youth's political inclinations towards Israel. To capture them most comprehensively, it adopts narrative inquiry in the form of life-story interviews. Atkinson asserts that the life story interview provides a practical methodological approach for the collection of personal narratives that reveals how a specific human life is constructed and reconstructed in representing that life as a story (2007: 224). Basically, life-story interviews involve collecting an individual narrative of a major part of his life through an interview, therefore producing a first-person text of a personal narrative, that includes the storyteller's subjectivity. This narrative can then be explored in regard to a particular methodology or research question (ibid.).

To inquire the construction process of a non-Israel centric Jewish identity, this research conducts a qualitative analysis through life-story interviews with four 18 to 35 years old members of French and British Jewish organisations in solidarity with Palestinians. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their affiliations with different organisations, representing different critical positions regarding Israel's policies. Their names were changed for anonymity purposes. For the UK, Josh is an active militant of Yachad, a Jewish organisation which declares itself to be "Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace" and seeks to "support Israel whilst also vocally supporting a resolution to the conflict and the creation of a viable Palestinian state", which can be considered a 'liberal Zionist' position (Yachad, 2022). The other British interviewee, Peter, is a militant of Na'amod, which describes itself as a "movement of British Jews seeking to end our community's support for the occupation, and to mobilise it in the struggle for freedom, equality and justice for all Palestinians and Israelis"

(Na'amod, 2022). Both French interviewees, David and Elie, are militant of the Union Juive pour la Paix (Jewish Union for Peace), which is openly anti-Zionist. The panel will therefore be varied in the form and the strength of the criticism. The life-story narratives of the four interviewees were collected to grasp of the storytellers' identity dynamics in regards to their relationship with the State of Israel. The narratives were then compared and analysed to highlight common patterns, enabling me to offer insights into determining factors and dynamics of identity shifts.

The primary risk coming from this method is that the stories emerging from the interviews might be framed by the questions asked by the researcher (Savin-Baden et al., 2007: 463). In order to limit this risk, the interviewees were asked to recount their stories in a way that would convey the meaning that they, as participants, would wish to be heard. The aims of the interview were stated at the beginning, and the questions were then limited, only seeking to deepen the interviewees' narratives. This thesis also acknowledges that the panel of interviewees is limited in number, but also in terms of gender representations are all four are men. However, all four interviewees represent different types of Jewish youth, having grown up in different communities, more or less religious and with different political inclinations, showing that processes of distancing from Israel are transversal within Jewish communities. Moreover, those four cases are coupled in this paper with other data, and interviews found in the literature, and used as illustrative cases. Therefore, this paper is confident that it can offer some insights into the process of identification and de-identification of young Jews towards the State of Israel.

I. Jewish Identity: Internal Debates

This first chapter begins with a conceptualisation of identity. Through looking at scholarly debates on identity construction, this paper focuses on the process of self-identification to study young diaspora Jews' identity construction. After developing theoretical basis, this chapter analyses historical debates over the nature of Jewish identity, and captures a tension between particularism and universalism in Jewish political thoughts, in order to grasp different communal narratives available for Jewish youth self-identification, and their interactions with social and political contexts. Finally, it looks at the ways in which the dynamics around Jewish identity translated politically on the issue of self-determination, dividing the community between the Zionist movement, and Diasporatism. In doing so, this chapter aims at offering a picture of the community's interactions over what constitutes Jewish identity, and the place of the State of Israel within it, overtime.

1. How to Conceptualise Identity?

Some scholars assert that the concept of identity can be apprehended as a variable that can be easily analysed and operationalised. Abdelal argues that identity can be measured according to different variables, mainly content and contestation, and so through different methods, such as surveys, content and discourse analysis (see Abdelal et al., 2004). By contrast, others have argued that identity represents a thick concept that is inherently complex and imprecise (Lebow, 2016: 73-74). Indeed, identity designates a multitude of dynamics, and gains different meanings according to the discipline in which its study evolves (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 5). In other words, the concept of identity has been used and defined by scholars in a wide variety of ways, at different times and spaces, to serve a broad range of research topics. As an example, a psychoanalyst invests a different meaning to identity then does an anthropologist inquiring the effect of colonialism on national identity. Seeking to find an exact definition and operationalise identity into different measurable variables would necessarily bring about a great number of limitations, and is therefore out of the scope of this paper. Brubaker and Cooper also alert on the risk of reifying identity through using it as a category of analysis. The scholars assert that identity can take the form of both a category of practice and a category of analysis. As a category of practice, identity is used by actors to identify themselves, to make sense of their activities, their roles or their relationships. Using identity as a category of analysis however posits that identity exists, therefore reifying the concept (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 5).

This paper will therefore not use identity as a category of analysis, which signifies that it will not attempt to offer a definition of Jewishness and develop an argument according to it. Rather, it will look at the process of identity formation, and particularly analyse the dynamics of conflicts and changes within this process. Stuart Hall argues that instead of considering identity as an

accomplished fact, we should think about it as a production, that is not fixed nor complete, but always in process (Hall, 1994: 222). This is indeed the departure point of this research: I assert that to look at the process of identity formation of young Jews and to analyse the conflicts and changes this process endures, bring us more information than trying to present a picture of different identities put forward by this youth. Turning to the analysis of the process enables us to avoid reifying identity, but also to reinstate agency. Indeed, looking at identification, rather than identity, leads us to precise the agents involved in the identification (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 14).

Scholars have attributed identification to the individual's self-construction, and to socialisation, but always disagreed on the relative strength of both (Lebow, 2014: 80). Indeed, assessing the space available for the individual to self-identify within given structure is a long-standing debate. At the basic level, identification takes place in a negotiation between one individual's self-understanding, and the external identification that is ascribed to him by others: family, social groups, or institutions (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 15-16). One can self-identify both in a relationship manner (friendship, student-teacher relation, etc.) and in a categorical manner (race, ethnicity, religion, social class, etc.). Categories are formalised and codified by powerful institutions. Both scholars, in line with Weber and Bourdieu, assert that the modern state has a central role in the individual's identification as it holds the symbolic power to name, identify and categorise what is what and who is who, and to diffuse those categories through teachers, judges, bureaucrats and the police (ibid.). This can be highlighted, as an example, by the social struggle to make same-sex marriage or transgender identity officially recognised. Besides, the state is not the only institution capable of creating categories and ascribing a set of meanings and practices to them: religious institutions, civil society organisations, informal groups, etc. also retain some level of symbolic power. It must however be underlined that both internal and external identification do not require an identified identifier, but that anonymous discourse or public narrative can be sufficient (ibid.).

The ways in which one identifies himself, or is identified by others, varies from one social context to another (ibid.). As an example, one can be externally identified as a Jew by an external group, through some institutionalised understanding of what being Jewish means, like having a Jewish mother or being part of a synagogue. This individual however holds some agency in deciding whether this ascribed identity suits him, and what being Jewish means to himself, which can differ from another person's understanding. Therefore, identification takes place in a constant negotiation between the individual and the different narratives he might chose to adhere to, delineated by his particular social context. Therefore, this paper interests itself in the different narratives available for young British and French Jews self-identification, looking firstly at narratives emerging internally from the Jewish community and their interactions with the external social and political context, to then turn to external dynamics.

2. How does the Jewish people self-identifies?

This paper, in line with Giddens, argues that self-identity is a "reflexive project of the self", that consists of sustaining but constantly revising biographical narratives. This endeavour takes place within a multitude of choices, filtered through abstract systems (1992: 5). Rather than abstract systems, we can think of available choices as different narratives shaped at the nexus of the Jewish community and the external world. The Jewish community indeed creates a variety of biographical narratives, conveying different histories, memories, values, norms, and offering a wide array of identity choices. On the other hand, other communities, whatever they might be (national, transnational, minority group, interest groups, etc.), offer an even wider, and constantly expanding array of narratives and identification choices. Indeed, the Jewish population worldwide approximates 15 million individuals in 2021, which only constitutes around 0,2% of the world population (Jewish Virtual Library, 2022). The amount of self-identification narratives offered by the community is therefore limited compared to outside ones. Moreover, Giddens underlines the fact that in the contemporary world, daily life increasingly takes place between the local and the global, which expands possibility of lifestyle choices almost to the infinite (Giddens, 1992: 5).

In the same line, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) highlight that the dominant paradigms of modern society are individualism and self-creation while the nation-state, class or ethnicity as traditional sources of individual identity are declining. "The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time" (Beck et al., 2002: 23). Studying the American Jewish diaspora, Cohen and Eisen (2000) reached similar conclusions: Jews increasingly distance themselves from the traditional religious or social organisations and institutions as an anchor of their identity, to become governed by the 'sovereign self' (cited by Lawrence, 2016: 197). Jewish youth therefore build their identity by self-identifying to particular narratives from almost open-ended choices emerging externally to the Jewish community, along with different ones emerging from within, but do so under the constraints of the particular social context they evolve in. Indeed, the community in which they live, the people that constitutes it, along with their geographical position, constitutes some of the factors influencing their choices. This creates a system of available options, built by the interactions of the community with external narratives. This paper therefore identifies two vectors of identifications for young diaspora Jews: internal self-identification, and external identification. Jewish youth constructs their identity at the interaction of how they understand themselves to be, according to both narratives internal to the Jewish community, and external ones, and how they are identified by others, again within and outside the community. Those two vectors of identifications can come together or create tensions, and the individual evolves within those interactions.

This paper focuses on the internal narratives offered to Jewish diaspora youth by the community and their interactions with external narratives. To do so, it analyses historical debates over the nature of Jewish identity, and their repercussions in contemporary Jewish writings. Since the Enlightenments, debates over Jewish identity evolved along the tension between particularism and universalism. Both particularism and universalism are present in Jewish theology and history. Particularism inscribes Jews as a chosen people that dwells alone, safeguarding their unique agreement with God and obliged to help their own before others. Universalism, on the other side, summons Jews to be a prophetic people, completing their mission to create a world of peace, justice and harmony through *tikkun olam*, the duty to repair the world, giving equal weight to their obligations towards Jews and non-Jews. This tension is present throughout the Torah, and leads to religious debate on the nature of the Jewish people: Are they Am Segulah, a chosen people? Are they Am Yoshev Lavad, a people that dwells alone? Or are they Or LaGoyim, a "light unto nations"? (Barnett, 2016: 7).

Barnett argues that Heine's law, according to which to understand the Jews we should begin by looking at the gentiles, is a good starting point to understand the influence of the external world on the Jewish community. Jewish identity is influenced both by the external world and by the reaction to the outside from within the community: one shapes the other. The nexus between the outside and the inside then influences the tension between the particular and the universal. Whether the particular or the universal holds more weight depend on particular historical circumstances: the culture of inclusion or exclusion within which the community lives (Barnett, 2016: 20). In other words, Jewish communities tend to lean more towards particularism when living under great antisemitism, and threatened in multiple ways. They put the emphasis on the defence of their religion and people. By contrast, when Jewish communities tend to be included within the nation, enjoying equal rights and opportunities, they tilt more towards universalism (ibid.). Therefore, narratives, along with individual's self-identification with them, are influenced by external variables, and change overtime. Moreover, those narratives translate into political inclinations. Indeed, Jewish political thoughts reflects the tension between particularism and universalism when debating the issue of national self-determination.

3. How do different identification narratives translate politically?

Barnett argues that at the beginning of the 19th century, most political communities referred to themselves as nations. Most Jews, and for much of their history, however saw themselves as a tribe, a social group defined by kinship, blood and lineage, rather than a religious community or a nation. Firstly, as Jewish religion is passed on through blood by a mother to her children, Jews become Jews from one generation to another, creating an ethnic link that ties the community together. However, in line with the universalist tradition, Jewish intellectuals in the 19th century were

reluctant to consider the Jewish people as a nation as the concept implies an inherent difference between Jews and non-Jews living in the same geographical areas. Indeed, considering Jews as a nation suggests that the community deserves national self-determination and could only secure their destiny within a nation-state, separated from the others (2016: 36).

However, those political debates, tightly linked to identity ones, did not evolve unaffected by the external social context in which Jews lived in. In the 19th century, however, European Jewish communities were not evolving under a homogenous context. In Eastern Europe, mainly in the Russian Empire, Jews were separated from the rest of the society, living in the Pale of Settlement, the only region where they had the right to buy land. In Western Europe, however, even if antisemitism was persistent, Jewish communities were integrating, driven by the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment) that was pleading for the relegation of the Jewish faith to the private sphere and the full assimilation of Jews within the nation-state (Englert, 2018: 160). The economic turmoil of the late 19th century, and the rise of antisemitism, politically divided the community between an internationalist movement, led by anarchist, Marxist and reformist organisations, following the universalist tradition, and the emerging Zionist movement, which emphasised particularism (Ollman, 2005: 6-7).

Rejecting the possibility of assimilation within the nation-state, Zionist thinkers began to theorise the need for national self-determination as the only defence to antisemitism. "The essence of the problem as we see it, lies in the fact that, in the midst of the nations among whom the Jews reside, they form a distinctive element which cannot be assimilated, which cannot be readily digested by any nation" declared Leon Pinsker in 1882 (cited by Becker, 2011). In 1896, Theodore Herzl, considered the founding father of Zionism, introduced in *The Jewish State*, a plan to establish a Jewish homeland, and created the Zionist Congress the following year to organise the colonisation of Palestine. At its creation, the Zionist movement did not enjoy a tremendous success, and was competing with other movements, such as the Bund, the Autonomists, Reform Judaism, for the community's approval. Those movements were actively fighting Zionism, as they saw its territorial ambitions as fundamentally flawed.

Indeed, while the Zionist movement was rallying a part of the European Jewish community, another part defended the universalist tradition, and asserted its attachment to a cosmopolite and fundamentally diasporist Jewish identity. Landy argues that diasporism, as any identity, is defined by what it excludes: the idea of a national homeland for Jews in Israel (2011: 40). Diasporism affirms that the true home of Jews should remain the diaspora and that being a diaspora subject is an important element of Jewish identity (ibid.: 41). It opposes itself to the idea of national self-determination, and upholds hybridity, universalism and rejection of nationalism as essential components of the Jewish identity (ibid.). It must be underlined that Jews never supported the creation of a Jewish state in a homogenous manner. Zionists themselves did not agree on their precise goal, the form of the state, its borders, or its secular nature. Moreover, some rabbis

advanced religious arguments to counter the project, arguing that the Jewish people should wait for the arrival of the Messiah to return his chosen people to a homeland of their own (Segal, 2017: 520).

However, the political context of the 20th century precipitated the Jewish community's adherence of Zionism. Forced to flee Europe to escape death, thousands of Jews migrated to Palestine, and became the first citizens of State of Israel in 1948. The massacre of 6 million Jews in Europe, and the necessity to support the newly born state, led diaspora Jews to emphasise their particularism, and slowly unite around Zionism. The 1967 proved to be another breaking point in diaspora identification dynamics. Indeed, the possibility of destruction of Israel by its Arab neighbors and the risk of a new genocide acted as a striking reminder for diaspora Jews of the risks endured by the Jewish people worldwide. The war therefore generated a groundswell of pro-Israel concern even among those not previously engaged with the state (Lederhendler 2000: 2). Attias and Benbassa assert that from 1967, Zionism became the civil religion of Jewish Americans (2003: 234). Movements that were still opposing the state, such as Reform Judaism, declared their solidarity with Israel that year (Waxman 1996: 381). Zionism therefore became the hegemonic political ideology of the Jewish people worldwide.

The hegemonic character of Zionism, however, does not erase the minority opposition. Diasporatism continued to be supported by Jewish thinkers along the 20th century. Writing with sympathy and apprehension about Israel, Isaac Deutscher pointed out that, wherever they were allowed to, European Jews had thrived, not as nation builders but as diasporic cosmopolitans, and that the founding of the Jewish state was another Jewish tragedy: "a monument to the grimmest phase of European history, a phase of madness and decay." (Deutscher quoted by Segal, 2017: 525). Einstein also wrote in this line:

"My awareness of the essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish state with borders, an army, and a measure of temporal power, no matter how modest. I am afraid of the inner damage Judaism will sustain – especially from the development of a narrow nationalism within our own ranks, against which we have already had to fight strongly, even without a Jewish state." (Einstein, 1954: 212)

Boyarin and Boyarin reassert that the condition of diaspora is not the result of war and destruction, but that even before the downfall of Judea there were a majority of Jews living voluntarily outside the land (1993: 722). They go further by arguing that the creation of the State of Israel, rather than representing the culmination of Jewish culture, subverted it. As an example, they assert that practices such as caring for other Jews, providing for the poorest or Jewish prisoners, carried some positive meaning within the diaspora, but convey an entirely different one under political hegemony: ethnic preferences and discrimination of minorities (ibid.: 712-713). In other

words, diaspora presented a model for Jews by making their well-being dependent on principles of respect for difference, on the slogan that "no one is free until all are free.", which has been undermined by Jewish state hegemony (Boyarin et al. 1993: 720).

Pierre Stambul, co-president of the organisation UJFP (French Jewish Union for Peace), explained the idea of diasporic identity in an essay untitled "To create the New Israeli, the Jew had to be killed". He asserts that contemporary history highlighted the falsification of Palestinian history to serve the Zionist narrative, and that the idea of a 'return' to Israel is a myth. Judaism expanded outside the boundaries of ancient Palestine through the conversion of different people (Berber, Romans, Spanish, etc.) and that diasporic existence is therefore not a consequence of dramatic events, but the centre of Jewish history, identities, languages and cultures (Stambul, 2009). Ivan Segré also maintained in his book *Judaism and Revolution* that the subjective rupture with the state actually composes the stone of Judaism (2014: 23).

To conclude, this thesis interrogates the identification dynamics of young French and British Jews with the State of Israel. To do so, it argues that they identify in a nexus between the Jewish community, and the particular identity narratives it conveys, and the universal, or external narratives. Within the Jewish community, debates over what constitutes Jewishness have been long-held, and divided the community into two main ideologies: Diasporatism, invoking the transnational nature of the Jewish people, and its universalism, and Zionism, advocating for the need for national self-determination in a Jewish nation-state, emphasising particularism. While Zionism became the majoritarian identity of the Jewish people, especially after the establishment of the State of Israel and the Six Days War, diasporatism has been increasingly revived by Jews not self-identifying with the Zionist project, a topic that will be discussed later on. This paper now looks at the current dynamics of identification of young diaspora Jews, and analyses the process according to which a fringe of this youth distances itself from an Israeli-centred identity.

II. The Distancing Hypothesis

This chapter aims at analysing the hypothesis according to which young Jews are increasingly distancing themselves from the State of Israel. As the literature and data concerning young American Jews are extensive, this paper uses them to deepen the analysis of European scholarship on British and French Jews. It firstly presents the distancing hypothesis, to then turn to existing debates on the determining factors of a potential distancing. Then, it looks at both the social and political context in which Jewish youth evolves, and argues that both French and British young Jews distance themselves from Israel as a central component of their identity, but less so in France then in the UK, where the political climate of antisemitism is more important.

1. Presentation

"I recently participated in a conversation about Israel with a group of five very thoughtful 20-something Jews from a variety of backgrounds. It was stunning to hear the pain, fear, and confusion that marks how young Jews engage with Israel — or try to engage. One word in particular came up over and over: Shame." (Rubin, 2020)

This thesis seeks to contribute to a debate scholars titled the distancing discourse. The distancing hypothesis emerged in the United States and is formulated, in its simple form, as follow: 18 to 35 years old non-Orthodox American Jews are increasingly distancing themselves from Israel, through both a decreasing emotional attachment to the state, and a decline of the perceived centrality of Israel in their Jewish identity (Rosner et al. 2011: 2). This hypothesis was formulated by Cohen and Kelman, who assert that all data points towards young Jews detachment from Israel: they say to be less emotionally attached to the state, less proud of it, or less excited about it than older generations (2010: 288). They are also less comfortable to self-identify as Zionist or pro-Israel, or with the idea of a Jewish state (ibid.: 289).

Rosner et al. identify three types of distancing. Firstly, an emotional distancing, which involves a weakening of a visceral or instinctive attachment with the State of Israel. According to the Pew Research Center report on American Jewry in 2021, 48% of American Jews aged 18 to 29 feel somewhat attached to Israel, against 63% of the 50 to 64 years old and 67% of the 65 years old and older (2021: 36). Strikingly, in a survey conducted in 2007, less than half of those surveyed who were under the age of 35 felt that Israel's destruction would be a personal tragedy, compared to more than three-quarters of those over the age of 65 (Waxman, 2017a: 179). In the UK and France, there is no data enabling a comparison of the attachment towards Israel between different age groups. The only statistic available on a large-scale sample is an average of European Jewry in twelve different EU member states, calculated by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency. Broadly, 62%

of European Jews under the age of 35 declare to have a strong attachment to Israel, while 72% of European Jews older than 60 years old declare the same (FRA, 2019: 11). This figure needs to be limited by the fact that Jews between 16 and 29 years old represented only 12% of the sample, and Jews between 30 to 44, 18%, compared to 43% of the respondents being older than sixty years old (FRA, 2019: 77).

Secondly, a cognitive detachment that induced reservations concerning the centrality of the State of Israel for Jewish thriving (Rosner et al. 2011: 4). Only 35% of the youth view caring about Israel as essential to being Jewish, while 45% of American Jews say so. In addition, among American Jews ages 50 and older, just 10% say that caring about Israel is not important to them. By contrast, among Jewish adults under 30, one-quarter (27%) say it's *not* important to what being Jewish means to them (Pew Research Center, 2021: 36). Actually, 72% declare living an ethical and moral life and 59% working for justice and equality in society are a core component of their Jewish identity (ibid.: 64). Young European Jews are 74% to declare that Israel is important for their Jewish identity, while their elders are 86% to say so (FRA, 2019: 15).

Third and last, the scholars identify a behavioural distancing, which consists of the erosion of actions manifesting connection with the State (2011: 5). The first action towards the Jewish state is funding. Barnett asserts that a generation ago, Jewish children were giving their change to different causes in Israel (plant trees, help settle the refugees, etc.) and that, while they still bring money to Sunday school, it is not channelled to the Jewish state anymore (2016: 200). Moreover, American Jews used to give through big organisations, such as the United Jewish Appeal which accounted for 80% of all giving between 1948 and the 1970s. In the 21st century, 90% of all donations now go to multiple organisations, outside of the UJA (ibid.). While the UJA manages to maintain a high donation level through focusing on major donors, the nature of the funding is therefore shifting (Raphael, 2020). It shall be underlined that American Jews are the main donors to human rights organisations such as B'Tselem. American Jewish organisations also constitute the top donors to Palestinian civil society organisations, accounting for 20 to 30 percent of their total grants (ibid.: 213).

More than giving, actions manifesting attachment towards the State include learning about and visiting Israel. In this field, the tendency seemed to be on the rise. Indeed, Waxman asserts that young Jews tend to interest themselves to Israel more than their elders, partly due to the proliferation of college course on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the rise of Palestinian and Israeli advocacy. Educational programs such as Taglit Birthright and Masa Israel which offer funded trips by the Jewish Agency to young Jews who have never been to Israel, have greatly increased the number of youth visiting the state (2017a: 185). In Europe, 89% of Jews between 16 and 34 years old declared to have been to Israel, only 2% less than Jews aged 60 or older (FRA, 2019: 18). However, many of my interviews underlined the fact that visiting the state does not necessarily correlate with a growing attachment. As an example, Josh mentioned the fact that a banner

inscribed "Zionist indoctrination" was attached in the tour bus and that people leading his birthright trip warned them, in advance of a meeting with the head of the Jewish Agency, that they will assist to "some communal brainwashing exercise". Elie asserted that visiting Israel for the first time made him understand the concept of the Nakba and the ethnic cleansing of the Palestine population in a really strong manner, starting his process of becoming anti-Zionist.

2. Debate Review

This trend of distancing from Israel among a part of the American Jewish youth has attracted particular interest, and anxiety, among Jewish scholars and journalists from all political inclinations in the last decade (see Beckerman, 2010, Graizbord, 2020, Landy, 2011, or Rosov, 2020). Rosner et al. produced a report in 2011 for the Jewish People Policy Institute, to highlight this distancing dynamic and make recommendations for the American Jewish establishment to counter it. They assert that although there is no "hard evidence" of emotional distancing from young American Jews, the researches are based on the assumption that this process would be linear, whereas a sudden shift is plausible (Rosner et al. 2011: 8). Some scholars, particularly from The Brandeis University's Cohen Center, dismissed the detachment trend through asserting that the weakened attachment observable in studies of younger Jews does not reflect a real distancing. Sasson and al. (2010) assert that the weakened attachment highlighted by the studies underlines a permanent feature of the Jewish life cycle: the fact that Jews get more attached and more supportive of Israel as they grew older. Although this hypothesis might hold some truth, one must deepen the analysis as the connection cannot be clearly demonstrated through data.

Indeed, Barnett asserts that some read data and find signs that the youth eventually turns more attached, while others interpret the same data as revealing that each generation is becoming more distant than the previous one. Staesky, in analysing the FRA survey answer of young British Jews, asserts that some variables do not enable a single causal explanation. Young British Jews tend to discern more between antisemitic and anti-Israel views than their elders: while this can be an age factor, the fact that they tend to be more optimistic and liberal and might grow increasingly pessimistic in the course of their life, age can be a marker of a cohort effect. Indeed, young Jews might distinguish more because they have been more exposed to educational programs, learned more about the differences between both, which is unlikely to dissipate with age but rather an outcome of being born in a specific place at a specific time (Staetsky, 2019: 52-53). The life-cycle hypothesis actually obliterates the fact that political opinions do not only change during a lifetime, but in a particular historical context (2016: 204).

Waxman indeed agrees that the current context around the State of Israel is different than the one known by young adults' parents. According to the scholar, young American Jews are not distancing from Israel as part of their identity, but are becoming increasingly critical towards the

state's policy. They do not approach Israel with unquestioning support, but condition it to the state's actions matching their values and beliefs. "The notion of simply being loyal to Israel is alien to them" (Waxman, 2017a: 181). This increasingly critical stance however does not reflect an alienation, but on the contrary a form of attachment (ibid.). The scholar evokes different factors leading young American Jews to be increasingly critical: they are more liberal, more oriented towards social justice and universalism as core components of their Jewishness, less impacted by the Holocaust memory and antisemitism, and do not share the same generational memories than their parents concerning Israel (ibid.: 178-179). How can we then measure those factors?

Barnett, along with Cohen and Kelman, argues that as American Jews' attitudes are much more complex than being for or against Israel, they cannot be reflected in standardised polls (2016: 197). Firstly, polls have limits: whether they are conducted during war or peace time have an influence, the respondents are central to: do you only ask Jews affiliated with a synagogue or also the so-called 'cultural Jews'? Moreover, the order according to which the questions are asked is central: if the question on the support of Israel comes after a series of questions possibly triggering negative feelings such as settlement expansions the answer is likely to be influenced (ibid.: 199). Therefore, rather than looking only to the data, researchers should analyse the global context within which the new generation of Diaspora Jews evolves (Cohen et al. 2010: 295). Barnett asserts that small group discussions might share more light on the complexities, highlighting a study made with Jewish youth who were asked about the sources of their Jewish identity (2016: 201). Luntz, an American pollster, led discussion groups on American campuses to discover why young Jews were not inclined to be better supporter of Israel. "Six times we have brought Jewish youth together as a group to talk about their Jewishness and connection to Israel" he reported. "Six times the topic of Israel did not come up until it was prompted. Six times these Jewish youths used the word 'they' rather than 'us' to describe the situation." (Cited by Beinart, 2010: 1). Through his study, Luntz highlighted the fact that the link to Israel was not the primary way for young Jews to connect with their Jewishness, and was not discussed by students without them being asked about it. As data are firstly hard to collect, especially for Britain and France, and hard to analyse, this thesis will look at the political and the social context in which young generations of diaspora Jews evolve, and discuss possible influence on their attitudes towards the State of Israel.

3. Political Context

Firstly, the political context through which young Jews interact with Israel is not the same as the ones their parents grew up with. As previously mentioned, the attachment of American and European Jewry has deepened in the aftermath of the Six Days War. At that time, Israel was running a risk of destruction and was tremendously seen as a state only weaving defensive power to protect its population from attacks of neighbouring states. Jews embraced Zionism before the Lebanon

war, the Second Intifada and the beginning of the settlements movement. They turned towards an Israeli society that was more secular, less divided, and did not greatly shifted towards the right yet (Beinart, 2010: 5). Their children however grew up between both intifadas, and got to learn about Israel through a brutal occupation and a series of overwhelming use of force against Gaza. Israel does not picture the socialist democracy pledging to be looking for peace with its neighbours, but a regional hegemon and violent occupier (ibid.: 6). Norman Finkelstein, speaking in the context of the United States, asserts that if Jews are increasingly defiant towards Israel, it is not because it is qualitatively worse than before, but rather because the record of its acts of violence is better known. Indeed, respected human rights organisations failed to fulfil their mandate on Palestine for years. After the first intifada and the creation of the Israeli organisation B'Tselem recording abuses in the occupied territories, international NGOs started to expose human rights violations to the international public. In 2021, Human Rights Watch published a report describing the apartheid system enforced on Palestinian by the Israeli government, followed by Amnesty International a few months later (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Amnesty International, 2022). It seems that they only began to do so when their silence was no longer tenable, and when an Israeli organisation was giving them the moral cover to do so (Finkelstein, 2012: 98). Either way, it is becoming increasingly hard for the Jewish Diaspora not to be aware of Israeli human rights violations, and even if some political leaders attempted to, blaming those reports as being antisemitic or pushing for double-standards is increasingly ridiculous.

Moreover, young Jews are also more exposed to the Palestinian narrative, both through social media and through campus activism. The Israel on Campus Coalition counted 1630 'anti-Israel' events on 181 campuses of American universities during the 2014-2015 academic year, an increase of 31% from the previous year (Waxman, 2017a: 184). Unfortunately, the number of pro-Palestinian events in British and French Universities is not available. Landy argues that student activism is quite important in Britain, and that the Zionist organisation Union of Jewish Students has, since 2008, struggled against many student mobilisations (2012: 90). Elements such as the campus campaigns of organisations like Palestine Solidarity Campaign in the UK can give a glimpse to the amount of Palestine related advocacy: they organise numerous events in universities, publish guides for student to launch BDS campaigns, materials such as leaflets and posters, etc. Initiatives such as the Israeli Apartheid Week on Campus make Palestine solidarity campaigns more visible to student, both in the US and in the EU, and this can be apprehended through surveys.

Young American Jews are more skeptical than their elders concerning the efforts of the Israeli government towards peace: only 24% of under 30 years old Jews think so, while 38% of 65 years old and older see sincere efforts towards peace. By contrast, they put more trust in the Palestinian leadership, being 18% to see an effort from the Palestinian part, while only 8% of the older ones do so (Pew Research Center, 2021: 149). Taking the example of the Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) movement, among those who heard about it, 34% of American Jews strongly

oppose it, while only 27% of the 18-29 do so (Pew Research Center, 2021: 154). Barnett argues that through discussions with Hillel volunteers, the Jewish Student Organisation in the US, he learned that the programs about Israel do not attract as much Jewish students as they once did, and that the organisation is therefore creating new events to adapt themselves to this trend (Barnett, 2016: 201). The Hillel French chapter, which is active in both Paris and Marseille, advertise on their website coworking spaces for Jewish youth, debates on Jewish religious law, volunteering opportunities to help disadvantaged or isolated people or cycle of religious studies. The State of Israel is absent in both the objectives and the agenda of the organisation, while the international website of the organisation advertise birthright trips and asserts that "Hillel seeks to provide every Jewish student with the opportunity to explore and build an enduring relationship with Israel." (Hillel, 2022).

Jewish youths are also confronted to the increased visibility of Palestinian advocacy on social media. In an interview, a young Yachad militant told me that May 2021 constituted a great awareness raising moments for progressive youth outside the Jewish community on Palestine, and engaged previously apolitical or apathetic people to suddenly posts news on Sheikh Jarrah on social media. According to him, a part of the community has become increasingly comfortable with left-leaning discourses on Israel, while another part felt the need to answer Amnesty International infographics with ones carrying some Zionist perspectives, mainly posts originating from organisations such as StandWithUs. He argues that instead of creating a new consensus, the increase of social media advocacy has deepened the fault line between Zionist and Pro-Palestinian youth, but also within the community, creating a fair amount of fights between friends and family about what to post and when to do it.

To sum up, the Israeli political context since the end of the 21th century, and the increased visibility of the Palestinian narrative, challenge the Jewish youth support of the state. While some attempt to deny or diminish the violence against Palestinians, like Martin Perez arguing in Haaretz that "(He is) not under the impression that Israeli occupation is kind and sweet, but bad things happen everywhere, all the time.", it is doubtful that Jewish youth would be inspired by the slogan "Israel: Not the world's only human rights violator." (Finkelstein, 2014: 30).

4. Social Context

In parallel to a shift in the political context, the society in which 21st century young Jews evolve is also different from their parents' one. I highlight three particular factors that might influence their relationship with Israel: the decrease of antisemitism, the rise of intermarriage, and the disengagement from any fixed and unique identity.

To begin with, young Jews are said to be less impacted by the Holocaust memory, and less victim of antisemitism than their elders (see Waxman, 2017a, Rosner et al., 2010, Beinart, 2010).

Barnett argues that antisemitism has virtually disappeared in the United States (Barnett, 2016: 202). According to the Anti-Defamation League, the number of antisemitic incidents has fell by 19 per cent in 2013, keeping with a continuous downward trend since the organisation started keeping records in 1979, and marking one of the lowest levels of incidents. In 2017, however, 1986 incidents were reported, a number that did not evolve much since, with 2024 recorded in 2020, which is historically high (ADL, 2020: 8). However, European Jews have different experiences than Americans in regard to hate crimes.

To begin with, the Holocaust has certainly had a lesser impact on the youngest Jewish generations. Born fifty years after the Shoah, and having learned about it more from books and movies than first-hand family accounts, although few Holocaust survivors are still alive, the trauma might be less present in their memories than in their parents' ones. However, young Jews, and particularly French ones, witnessed violent anti-Semitic attacks in the last decades. In 2006, Ilan Halimi, a young Jew, died after being tortured by a group of 26 people for multiple days. A few years later, on March 11, 2012, a terrorist opened fire at a Jewish school in Toulouse, killing three children and one teacher. In January 2015, a few days after the terrorist attack on the newspaper Charlie Hebdo, Amedy Coulibaly broke into a kosher supermarket in Paris, killed four people and took 16 others for hostages. In 2018, a Holocaust survivor, Mireille Knoll, was stabbed and set on fire in her Parisian apartment, during a robbery motivated by antisemitism, echoing the murder of Sarah Halimi, a year before, who was defenestrated from her apartment by his neighbour, who declared to have "killed the Shaitan". This series of events sparked public outcry over antisemitism in France, and instilled a feeling of being unsafe within the Jewish community.

In both France and Britain, antisemitism has been on the rise for the latest years. The French interior ministry counted 687 anti-Semitic accidents in 2019, against 541 the previous year, a rise of 27%. The violence of the incidents however decreased by 44% compared to 2018 (Chavrou, 2020). In the UK, according to the Home Office, 1288 anti-Jewish hate crimes were recorded between 2020 and 2021, which account for 22% of the religious hate crimes for the year. Those figures are however complicated to analyse, firstly because most incidents are not getting reported to the police. Secondly, because they are not recorded in the same way every year, and a similar manner in different states, enabling few cross annual and cross-national comparisons. Moreover, some organisations recording antisemitism have increasingly used the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which characterises certain critics of Israel as anti-Semitic behaviour and is highly debated (see Gould, 2022, and Ullah, 2021). Data able to offer more insights into the current situation account for the perception of antisemitism. According to the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, there is a great discrepancy between French and British perceptions of antisemitism. In 2012, antisemitism was considered a very big problem by 52% of French Jews, and 11% of British Jews (FRA, 2013: 16). In 2018, 65% of French Jews and 28% of British Jews declared antisemitism to be a very big problem, a significant rise. British Jews were 22% to declare it was not a very big problem,

against only 5% of French Jews. Moreover, French Jews were 77% to declare antisemitism increased a lot in the past five years, against 58% of British Jews (FRA, 2019: 18-19).

Barnett argues that when Jews feel safer and more accepted, they tend to be less tribal and therefore less concerned about Israel (2016: 202). Arguably, the more threatened the Jewish community feels in one state, the more likely it is to support Israel as a protector of world Jewry. Hagai et al. assert that an individual sense of collective victimhood does not necessarily rely on personal experiences, but rather on shared collective discourses (2013: 290). The political climate in France might therefore explains why French Jews tend to support and feel more attached to Israel than the British community. More than the perception of antisemitism, there is also a great discrepancy in the perception of criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic: in 2018, 42% of French Jews consider criticising Israel definitely or probably anti-Semitic, as against 34% of British Jews (FRA, 2019: 29). Moreover, 87% of French Jews consider boycott of Israel anti-Semitic, as against 75% of British Jews (FRA, 2019: 29). Those differences might be explained by different factors, but in studying the FRA survey, Staetsky found that British and French Jews who experienced anti-Jewish harassment in the 12 months before the survey tend to make less of a distinction between anti-Israel and anti-Semitic arguments than those who did not (2019: 51). One can therefore argue that heightened antisemitism leads to heightened support for Israel, which manifests itself in the degree of attachment, along with the lack of distinction between anti-Semitic and anti-Israel attitudes.

However, if anti-Israel critics are perceived as anti-Semitic more in France than in the UK, it is also possible that it influences the perception of antisemitism in the community. Indeed, if French Jews are 42% to think that criticisms of Israel are probably anti-Semitic, then an increase in Palestinian advocacy, along with negative sentiments towards Israel from the broad public following the second intifada and the multiple wars on Gaza, can influence the perception of a rise of antisemitism in the state. To conclude, while the Holocaust memory certainly has a lesser impact on French and British young Jews, the latest rise of antisemitism, particularly in France, could have an impact on their attachment towards the State of Israel, more towards strengthening than distancing, as opposed to American Jewish youth.

A second factor that might influence young Jews attachment to Israel is inter-marriage. Cohen and Kelman particularly emphasise inter-marriage as a structural factor undermining Jewish support for the state of Israel (2010: 291). Indeed, the rate of intermarriage is quickly increasing in the United States: before 1980, only 18% of American Jews were married to a non-Jewish spouse. Between 2010 and 2020, 61 of all married Jews were so, a percentage raising to 72% for married non-orthodox Jews (Pew Research Center, 2021: 39). In Britain, the trend is less pronounced. In a 2011 census, 78% of married Jews had a Jewish spouse, while 22% were out-married. Among cohabitating British Jews, 68% have a non-Jewish partner (Graham, 2016: 12). Like in the US, the rate of intermarriage is increasing: they constituted 11% of the marriage between 1965 and 1969,

reaching 23% between 1980 and 1984 (ibid.: 15). In France, a study led in 2002 showed that mixed marriage constituted 30% of Jewish marriages, a number rising to 40% among those less than 30 years old (Auffray, 2002).

Children born from mixed couples are less likely than others to be raised as Jewish. Indeed, in 2020, 30% of American Jews married to a non-Jewish spouse declared that their children were not raised as Jewish, while only 1% of in-married couples do so (Pew Research Centre, 2021: 40). In Britain, 10% of children with a non-Jewish mother are raised Jewish, while 44% of them with a non-Jewish father are. Intermarried men are therefore four times less likely to raise children as Jewish than intermarried women (Graham, 2016: 19).

Moreover, while many non-Jewish spouses convert to Judaism, this does not necessarily translate into an attachment to Israel (Barnett, 2016: 202). 57% of American Jews whose spouse is Jewish say caring about Israel is an essential part of what being Jewish means to them, while only 31% of out-married American Jews declare so (Pew Research Centre, 2021: 66). In Britain, the gap is similar: 44% of out-married Jews say supporting Israel is important, while 85% of in-married Jews do so (Graham, 2016: 21). European data also underline this discrepancy: In-married European Jews are 60% to declare that supporting Israel is very important for their Jewish identity, and 47% to declare being very strongly attached to Israel, while 42% of the out-married see Israel as central in their identity and 29% to be attached to the state. (DellaPergola et al. 2021: 27 and 68). Therefore, the more Jews marry non-Jewish spouses, the more likely new generations will grow increasingly distant from Israel. This trend could be moderated by the fact that the Orthodox Jewish population is increasing more than Conservative, Liberal or Secular communities, and that intermarriage is almost non-existent within the Orthodox community: only 2% of American Orthodox Jews are married to non-Jewish spouses (Pew Research Center, 2021: 39).

Thirdly, Rosner et al. identify three different factors relating to contemporary shifts in ways of approaching identity that might lead to a distancing from Israel by American Jewish youth: a general tendency to disengage from any fixed identity, an emphasis on individual components of Jewish identity at the expense of traditional communal ones, and a decline in the importance of Jewish organisations in shaping the identity of younger generations (2010: 9).

To begin with, Lawrence argues that identity had become increasingly fluid and dynamic, and is no longer determined by any fixed authorities such as religious institutions or communal organisations. The Jewish Diaspora is increasingly fragmented and decentralised, and traditional institutions driving unity are therefore outdated (2016: 194). It is important to highlight that the decreased attachment to Israel among younger Jews does correlate with a decrease in their Jewish identification. Indeed, among Jews with only one Jewish parent, younger generations are more likely to identify as Jewish: 47% of Jews aged 18 to 47 years old, while only 21% of the older ones do so (Pew Research Center, 2021: 43). How can we interpret this trend? While identifying quite

strongly with their Jewishness, young American Jews regard it as having less importance to their lives: 33% say being Jewish is not important to their lives, while 20% of the 50 to 64 years old say so (ibid.: 61). Can we then argue that while identifying more often with their Jewishness than their elders, young American Jews do so in a weaker way?

The answer might turn more complicated. American Jewish identity has become in the last decades more fluid and personal. Jews are more likely than before to experiment with multiple and hybrid identities and to merge with other communities, like non-Jewish Americans (2016: 203). American Jews aged 18 to 29 are 35% to declare that hardly any or none of their close friends are Jewish, compared to 15% of Jews aged 65 or older (Pew Research Centre, 2021: 111). They are also less to declare that they feel a great deal of belonging to the Jewish people (39%) than their elders (56%) (ibid.: 112). The British community reflects a similar trend. According to Williams, young British Jews between 18 to 35 years old are more likely to choose non-synagogue portals of involvement and cross-communal meeting places. According to the scholar, this shows a global trend that people are finding friends, partners and meaning outside of the mainstream Jewish community and synagogue (Williams, 2010: 20-21). Therefore, young Jews, while still strongly identifying with their Jewishness, also experiments with different identities and cross communities more than their parents did.

Moreover, young Jews are increasingly disengaging themselves from religious and communal organisations. Williams argues that young British Jews are less likely to be affiliated to a religious or a communal organisation then their elders (2010: 20-21). Indeed, in Britain, synagogues memberships declined by 24% between 1983 and 2010 (Graham et al. 2010: 10). The fact that Jewish community centres or synagogues have a declining centrality in Jewish life means that young Jews are less likely to receive the clear pro-Israel message that those organisations usually convey (Barnett, 2016: 203). In France, the trend goes the opposite. In a 2002 study, Cohen underlines the fact that while 35% of French Jews declared in 1988 to have never associated with the Jewish community, they are 18% to said so in 2002. Moreover, the number of children going to Jewish schools has doubled on the same period, with more than a quarter of Jewish children enrolled in private Jewish institutes (Auffray, 2002). Whether this trend is similar among different age groups cannot be analysed.

Finally, young Jews tend to emphasise individual components of Jewishness, rather than communal ones. More particularly, it is well documented that young Jews are shying away from particularism to embrace cosmopolitanism and universalism as core components of their Jewishness (Rosner et al.: 2011: 18). Waxman argues that the liberalism of young Jews led them to seek a bigger purpose for Jewish politics than the community or Israel's survival, such as social justice or the environment, showing a preference for a universalistic approach to Jewishness. The pursuit of social justice, symbolised by Tikkun Olam, is regarded by many young American Jews as central to their Jewish identity (Waxman, 2017a: 185). Indeed, Barnett asserts that American Jews volunteer,

join campaigns and do service work in a disproportionate number compared to the rest of the American society. In the 1990s, social justice became prominent in their engagement: more and more Jewish organisations were founded under the banner of Tikkun Olam (2016: 218). According to the scholar, the popularity of Tikkun Olam reflects the break-up of American Jews with a "survival mentality" and the reconnection with cosmopolitanism (ibid.: 220). While the rise of Tikkun Olam is linked to a global religious resurgence that intersects with discourses of humanity and universal ethics, there might also be a connection with Israel (2016: 222). Indeed, the rise of Tikkun Olam might lead American Jews to scrutinise Israel's values and get more distant. On the other side, the ambivalence of the community towards Israel might lead American Jews to turn to Tikkun Olam to express their Jewish identity in an alternative way (ibid.: 225).

To conclude, British and French young Jews seemed to follow the distancing trend noticed among their American counterparts. They are more critical toward Israel than their elders, and more likely to identify with other values as a source of their Jewishness. However, while the political context toward Israel in which they evolve is similar, the social context differs between France and Britain. Indeed, French Jews perceive themselves to be under the growing threat of antisemitism, and tend to strengthen their ties with the Jewish community, and to distance themselves from Israel to a lesser extent than do British Jews. British Jews, while also perceiving a rise in hate crimes, are less impacted by it, and more likely to be critical and distant towards the Jewish state and evolve towards out-community groups.

III. Identification Between the Universal and the Community

This chapter will analyse the distancing process of young French and British Jews within the vector of identification between the community's hegemonic Zionist ideology and external discourses carrying left wing values. It will firstly analyse the Zionist education of the interviewees, highlighting the communal overwhelming support for Israel. Then, it will discuss the feeling of discomfort or alienation expressed by some young Jews towards the state of Israel's policies pushed by three factors: left wing politicisation, forming experience in Israel and conversations with Palestinians or/and progressive friends. Finally, it will interest itself to the what some interviewees described as the space in the middle, the conflict between the community (friends, family, religious or communal organisations, etc.) and out-community groups (friends, left wing spaces, university unions, etc.), and the difficulties to find a place within both groups.

1. Growing Up as Zionist

Before discussing the process of dis-identification with Zionism, it seems important to describe how the interviewees were socialised as strong supporters of the State of Israel. Josh grew up within the Orthodox community in Leeds, in the United Kingdom. He used to go to the synagogue every week, attend a Jewish nursery and primary school, and participate in the religious Zionist movement Ben Yakiva. At school, JNF maps were up the walls in his classroom, and he attended lessons on Israel's culture and history, which was never questioned or brought about with critical lenses. He also received an education on Israel from his parents, but with more progressive standards. "It was part of your Jewish upbringing, an engagement with Israel". He told me the first demonstration he attended was a pro-Israel protest countering one in solidarity with Palestine in 2014. "So it is a thing I don't say to my leftist friends. Their first demonstration was against the war in Iraq, mine was in support of Israel." Within his community, it was "presumed, universal, everyone is a Zionist. Some people are Zionists in different ways but it is never questioned."

Peter had a different experience. Born to two Christian parents, he decided to become a Jew at the age of 18 years old. When beginning his conversion process, it appears to him it was central that he identified as a Zionist: "When I became Jewish, I was like 'ok well it is de facto crucial that I become a Zionist'". While he was never an outspoken supporter of the State of Israel, he considered himself a liberal Zionist, who supported the existence of the state, and did not really question it.

Elie grew up in a secular communist family, sitting on the radical left of the political spectrum, "except for Palestine". While his Jewishness was quite fragile, as not maintained by his family culturally or religiously, and as he grew up away from communal structures, he always identified as a leftist Zionist. He was fascinated by Zionism, by the capacity of the nationalist movement to

recreate a modern identity and to revive the Hebrew language in such a short amount of time. For his twentieth birthday, he went to Israel in a oulpan to learn Hebrew. While he always identified as a leftist and was thoughtful about the Palestinian rights, he still highly supported the Jewish state.

David was born in a religious Mizrahi family, quite observant of traditional rituals, and also Zionist. He analyses their Zionism not as highly militant but more as an emotional attachment. In his words, the rhetoric is the following: "We are Jews, we love Israel, it is our country, there is only one in the world and it is here to protect us". During his childhood, he enjoyed the Jewish holidays as a time of family gatherings, and was strongly Zionist. "I was someone who was already interested by the world at the age of 14/15 years old, I was repeating what I was hearing around me and was therefore really Zionist, to the point of going to a voluntary mission with the Israeli Defense Forces when I was 16 years old". He asserts he did not know much but was "wading through this ideology that was formatting us" and plainly adhering to the Zionist discourse, even to racist ideas such as the fact that all Palestinians were terrorists.

All four of my interviewees, despites having really different backgrounds, were initially more or less strongly Zionists. This highlights the fact that the political ideology is hegemonic among a wide range of Jewish communities, but also that the process of dis-identification with it concerns a great variety of young Jews. Those four case studies, coupled with others emanating from the literature, will therefore illustrate a variety of distancing processes, while highlighting their similarities.

2. Discomfort/Alienation

Lawrence (2016), through a study of North American Jewish critics of Zionism, explains that their protest against the State of Israel began with a feeling of discomfort. The discomfort stemmed from different issues: some invoked positions on gender equality or racism as causes of their feeling of alienation from the community, others struggled with particular injunctions, such as the one to have as many Jewish friends as possible. Lawrence argues that often, the sense of alienation preceded the turn away from Zionism and Israel, but sometimes it was speaking against Zionism that complicated the relationship with the community (2016: 198-199). From my discussions with those four young Jews, I identified three components explaining the installation of discomfort with Israel's policies or with Zionism: a parallel or prior politicisation leading to conversations with critical friends, meeting with Palestinians and discussing their experience, and formative moments in Israel. For most of them, all three happened simultaneously and highlighted conflicting identifications.

To begin with, three of my interviewees have been involved with leftist, progressive political groups. Josh told me that when he began university, he was "clearly moving to left on issues". He was involved with the Labour Party, at a time when Israel and Palestine were highly discussed. "I was not really involved specifically, I read (on the conflict) just because as a young Jew involved in the Labour Party that was the conversation that was all around me, and that was very much self-

directed". His involvement led him to meet other militants, Jewish or not, and to be confronted to his identification with the Zionist movement. David moved to the Left on many issues at 16-17 years old, "except for Palestine" at first, which created what he describes as a loyalty conflict. His link with Israel was starting to create contradictions with the new values he was acquiring, and he began to question himself, and to read more and more about the question. He discovered Marxist ideas when he moved to Lyon to study and "became liberal Zionist, then a Zionist on the far left, then non-Zionist and finally anti-Zionist." He told me that he became involved in a Trotskyist party, which created workshops on revolutionary texts and dealt with the question of Palestine, and became anti-Zionist at one of those workshops. Elie was the "leftist Jew" in his family. He participated in an occupation in his university against a right-wing reform in France, and had many friends joking about the fact that his position on Palestine was not clear. His de-Zionification process however started during a trip to Israel, leading us to the two next factors.

Landy noticed that for some Jews, the turn towards a distancing from Israel has happened in the process of trying to bridge their Zionism with their leftist values, while for others it was provoked by a single moment where too many pieces of evidence accumulated (2011: 125). Nepstad and Smith (2001) found out in a research about Latin American solidarity that information accumulation is important but not sufficient to engender an identity shift. People often need to experience a moral shock, an emotional crisis, to let their repressed knowledge become unrepressed. This thesis however found out that the emotional shock can form the basis of a distancing process before the accumulation of information as well. When Elie went to Israel for his 20th birthday, he met Palestinians he was then calling "Arab Israelis", and asked them about their experiences. Quickly, they decided to bring him to Tzvat to show him the city:

> "You arrive there, it's beautiful, the Palestinian-Middle-Eastern architecture, it is Arab, really Arab. And there is no more Arabs, zero, nothing. I only see people, Jews completely turned on, dressed like hippies with their djembe, singing religious songs to speed up the arrival of the Messiah, but no Arabs, zero. And the more the people looked like Arabs, the more they had Jewish identity markers, of course. And that's when I discovered what the word Nakba meant, really, it took hold of me, it imposed itself on me. And that's when my process of de-Zionification started."

Landy argues that such conversion moments often happen in Israel, as the physical and emotional experience of being a first-hand witness of Israeli brutality is often shocking to diaspora Jews (2011: 127). David had a similar experience when he went to Israel to volunteer for the IDF. During a visit of Jerusalem, the call for prayer rang, and some youth from his groups started to scream "go back home", and other racist sentences, which profoundly shocked him and led him to progressively move to the Left during high school.

For Peter, meeting with Palestinians has been determinant. He told me about a particular conversation he had with fellow Palestinian students about their experience with checkpoints, which greatly shocked him. He asserts that: "The big thing for me to turn into an anti-Zionist was not only reading and learning but mostly meeting with Palestinians and sort of hearing their experiences with racism, subjugation and occupation and it made me realise that this is a structural thing, it is so widespread, and the experiences are so similar between the people I met. This is not something that happened by chance, this is ingrained."

To conclude, a feeling of discomfort or alienation from Zionism and its consequences for the Palestinian people was instilled among this study's respondents by a politicisation and identification with leftist values. Through their activism, those young Jews learned more about the Middle East conflicts, and held important conversations with progressive friends, leading them to interrogate their unconditional support for the State of Israel. Moreover, for most of them, the accumulation of evidence concerning Palestinian sufferings, oppression or human rights violations were coupled with particular emotional chock provoked in Israel, or by conversations with Palestinians. While one did not necessarily need to come before the other, the combination of those factors led them to interrogate their Zionist positions and to grow increasingly alienated from them.

3. The Space in the Middle

Discomfort with Zionism led my interviewees to begin a distancing process, and to seek new identifications in the nexus between the community's Zionism, and universal discourses of social justice and human rights. However, some of them struggled to find appropriate spaces for their identity construction between their Jewish community and the left-wing spaces in which they evolved. My point of departure will be a story told by Josh. While Josh grew increasingly militant and advocated for a just political situation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he shared on Instagram a post advocating for the boycott of certain Israeli products as a reasonable way to achieve peace. Reactions from his community were quick: a former friend of his attempted to push him out of the National Council of the Union for Jewish Students, declaring the support of boycott as a reason for his dismissal. The same week, a BDS motion was initiated by pro-Palestinian students at his British university, and even if conflicted, he decided to campaign against it, as co-president of the Student Union:

> "Understandably a lot of the pro-Palestinian students were then, not so happy with me and the same week that these people I knew from home were trying to strike me off from this Jewish student organisation I had, people I knew from university had a vote of confidence for me in the Student Union, (…) it was not a great week. Had I supported that BDS motion or not campaigned against it, suddenly all those spaces I am involved with in the community

would have been off-limits to me, I would be a pariah, I would be a far-left lunatic. But on the flip side, in trying to tell that line I became some of a persona non-grata in lots of left-wing spaces. (…) And so, it is quite easy to separate and like compartmentalise until suddenly (clack his tongue), you still know these people. So yeah that is difficult."

From this account, one element appears clearly: the complexity of the balancing act between a former Zionist community, and new left-wing ones. Josh's account shows that while personally in favour of specific boycott and divestment measures on Israeli settlements, supporting a BDS motion was over-limits for him. Growing up in a community that represented the BDS movement as the "ultimate evil", he could not support the motion, for him, but mostly to avoid being entirely alienated from his communal ties and personal friendships. Navigating both communal spaces and left-wing ones put young Jews' self-identities to test, and tend to force them into making choices. Waxman observed a similar dynamic on American campuses: due to the heated atmosphere around the conflict, Jewish students get incentives from progressive and pro-Palestinian students to distance themselves from Israel, while some national Jewish organisations push them to join their battle against BDS. Lots of students therefore prefer to steer clear of both sides and avoid dealing with the question altogether (Waxman, 2017a: 185). Finkelstein also asserts that while Israel moves to the right, a small minority of American Jews publicly denounce the state's policies, while a larger portion tends to lapse into silence: not wanting to engage with it in an outspoken manner, while not willing to defend the indefensible (Finkelstein, 2012: xviii).

Josh argues that he felt sometimes uncomfortable in progressive left-wing spaces as the topic of Palestine was always brought to him in an unsolicited manner, making him feel like "the only Jew in the room". He was also highly embarrassed in Jewish spaces which were mostly supported by hard-line Zionist organisations such as Camera on Campus or Stand with Us.

"I was fairly squeezed in the middle. (…) there are basically two separated worlds and there is a couple of people, myself and a couple of friends who travelled between those two worlds but most of it is: the right-wing imperialism against the progressive student left is progressive, and no margin for crossover."

Josh's experience underlines the lack of fluidity in self-identification possibilities, and the conflicting dynamics created at the nexus between the community and the external world. Young Jews are pushed into making a choice between alienating themselves from the community they grew up with, or not embracing their political opinions entirely. While some decide to stay within a middle ground, gently criticising the occupation or staying silent, others confront the Zionist project, and seek alternative Jewish spaces to maintain some level of self-identification with the Jewish community, a topic dealt with in the next chapter.

IV. Losing and Reshaping Communal Identity

The last chapter of this thesis discusses the articulation of self-identity by critical/anti-Zionist young Jews within the community. It will therefore analyse the distancing process through the vector of identification from within, focusing on in-group processes. Firstly, it will deal with the loss of communal ties by critical young Jews, and the difficulties endured by some in affirming their political stances. Then, it will discuss the need for alternative communal spaces, in which critical young Jews can have open discussions, defend themselves from the stigma of being self-hating Jews and find a new community that suits their identification and political needs. Finally, it will discuss how those critical communal spaces revived a diasporic Jewish identity, and created a new space for non-Zionist Jews to reconcile their Jewishness and their opposition to the Zionist project.

1. Coming out as Anti-Zionist

Most of this study's interviewees talked about the difficulties endured by becoming critics of Israel, and the great ruptures it created in their lives. In an overwhelmingly Zionist community, Jews defending a cosmopolitan or diasporist identities have long been accused of being self-hating Jews. As an example, Friesel (2011) argues that Jews opposing Israel have a problematic Jewish identity that reaches a point of a new pattern of Judeophobia. Isaiah Berlin endorsed the idea that cosmopolitan Jews suffer from various emotional diseases and psychoanalytic neuroses as they seek to break their membership with the group (cited by Barnett, 2016: 23). Indeed, Naples explains that the construction of a community requires building who may be part of it, who is a 'legitimate member', which serves as both internalised and externalised means of social control. When one seeks to break the consensus, he is immediately silenced and ostracised. Others silence themselves not to disrupt the sense of community (Naples, 2003: 57). Landy argues that community as censorship is a concept familiar to diaspora Jews (Landy, 2011: 69). Indeed, some have experienced speaking out against Israel as a coming out. Gelman (2002), a Jewish activist of Jews Against the Occupation, asserts that: "Coming out against the occupation is terrifying for people. Nobody had been talking about it for years, and if you tell the wrong person that you oppose the occupation, you can get any response, from rage to disgust." (Gelman, 2022).

Peter, an activist within Na'amod, told me that his anti-Zionist positions led him to endure multiple confrontations with a far-right Zionist student in his university, that regularly came to his friends to ask them how was the "antisemite Jewish society" he ran. While in some cases he could not hide his political opinions, in others, such as with his Rabbi, he would not be outspoken not to damage their relationship. "You have to be careful about how open you are on your positions because it could close off lots of doors. And especially in the process of converting, if I go out and say yeah I am anti-Zionist I doubt many rabbis would be happy to facilitate the conversion process." (Peter, 2022). As mentioned above, one of Josh's former friends, attempted to exclude him from

the National Council of the Union for Jewish Students due to a post on social media supporting a boycott of Israeli settlements' goods. "He refused to sit in a meeting with me because he hates BDS".

For other critical Jews, coming out as anti-Zionists triggered important familial ruptures. Lawrence found out that most of his interviewees talked about death threats, hate emails, and accusations of self-hatred, and had to renegotiate their views with family and friends to avoid being rejected. Joshua as an example told him: "I had cousins delete me from Facebook and say that the work I was doing was antisemitic. My mom, it took my mom years and years to come around. We couldn't have conversations about it. And I talked to my Rabbi about it, and he just shouted at me." (Joshua, cited by Lawrence, 2016: 201). My interviewees told me about similar experiences. Elie was called a terrorist by his uncle at his grandfather's funeral. An entire part of his family would not speak to him again. David also had many clashes with his relatives: "With my parents, even if we disagreed, we could discuss it. With some of my uncles, aunts and cousins, who were really close to me, it has been very difficult, some of them I did not speak with since. The topic would come during dinner, and I could not shut up. We would clash each other really quickly, screaming everywhere, and as I was one against all, I screamed harder, until we did not speak about it anymore." He also asserts that he often felt sad to be the only one to think this way within his own community. "What hurts a bit is to be seen as a traitor, as someone who betrays something, when you see your commitment more as an act of love towards your family, towards what you denounce. We want to tell them it's not to throw stones at you, it's to save you in fact, (…) we have a beautiful history, a tradition we are ruining by putting it at the service of this political project. So in that there is an act of love which is seen as a betrayal".

Enduring a break-up for the community, and from friends and family, some of my interviewees talked about fractures with their Jewish identity. Elie's internal conflict between his leftist values and his Jewish identity led him to choose between one and the other, before he managed to bridge them into a common identity. "Having been very much on the Left, especially on international issues but not on Palestine, I had to sweep my Jewishness under the carpet to live as a left-wing activist or to put the left elsewhere to feel Jewish." (Elie, 2022). When David started to de-identify from Zionism, he also de-identified with his Jewishness: "I walked away from Judaism too, I thought it wasn't for me, that I wasn't religious anyway. I think maybe it was a way of resolving a loyalty conflict for me, I'm not sure but maybe I had been trained so much to believe that when you're a Jew you're naturally Zionist, it's a given almost naturally, that when I realised that I couldn't embrace Zionism and make it my own I maybe unconsciously said to myself that it was distancing me from Judaism too.". Lawrence observed the same phenomenon in his interviews. Jordy's decision to shy away from Zionism fractured her Jewish identity: "It's been very difficult I think, in terms of coming to new ideas, but also feeling that disconnection from people, the arguments that it creates within a family. And the loss of, I guess a collective identity in politics." She spoke of a

sense of "loss and mourning" (Lawrence, 2016: 202). Most critical Jews describe becoming critical of Zionism as a painful and long process as in most cases Zionism was hard to differentiate from everything they perceived as Jewish (schools, synagogues, family, etc.) (ibid.: 199). To conclude, becoming outspoken critics of Israel is a difficult process, leading to ruptures with the community, and with the youth's Jewish identity.

2. Individual Need for Alternative Spaces

When speaking about the fractures created by moving away from an Israeli-centred identity, all my interviewees talked about the need to find alternative Jewish spaces, and so for two reasons: the need to be reassured in their militant commitment against Israeli policies through removing the stigma associated with their positions, and the need to form a new community when the previous one becomes out of reach.

Firstly, most Israel-critical Jews talked about the fact that they were relieved to recognise they were not the only ones to endorse critical or anti-Zionist positions. Indeed, when breaking the community's consensus, individuals tend to be rejected and ostracised, being shown that they cannot be fully Jewish without being fully Zionist. Therefore, meeting with other non-Zionist Jews undermines the strength of the argument through providing counter-examples. Alyssa, one of Lawrence interviewees, declared that: "It was like, I'm not crazy! There are other people that have gone through this path and have come to the same conclusions. Yeah. So, it was a really important time . . . figuring out that there are other ways to be Jewish." (Alyssa, cited by Lawrence, 2016: 200). David told me that when joining the UJFP, he felt "good to find Jews expressing themselves as Jews in this sense" (in an anti-Zionist way). Peter also described this feeling:

> "I think we should get rid of the colonial structures of Israel, not saying necessarily abolish it but more dismantle the occupation and Na'amod gives us the space to do that. (…) It is a space I don't really have in the Jewish society, not to say that they are not accommodating of political beliefs but I am very much the black sheep of the group. But obviously it is a very apolitical space, and I need a political space to be in, with other Jews as well." (Peter, 2022).

The need to find alternative spaces to be able to discuss Israeli policies, Jewish identity, and ways to oppose the occupation as a Jew, seemed important for the identification process of the young militants I interviewed. Elie asserted that meeting the UJFP has been really important to be able to discuss his de-Zionification process with other Jews sharing the same experience. He told me he also found the space with friends to discuss it, but mainly with Jewish friends, as the conversations were better "to debate, to argue, to understand each other and to move forward together". Some of Landy's interviewees said Israel-critical groups were important to discuss the

issue of family and friends' confrontations with people living the same experience (2011: 135). Josh regretted that those spaces were not more numerous. He asserted that living in Leeds, he felt very separated from those progressive communal spaces:

"There is a progressive community but it is small and they are not so many young people so I would go down to London and see my friends and talk about these things, and then I would go home and I was running a youth service at this point at my Orthodox Synagogue and then trying to raise critical questions but it was never, there was never really a space where I was based at that point."

Secondly, alternative progressive Jewish political spaces enable Jewish activists to counter the stigma associated with their political positions. Indeed, Landy argues that social movements seek to turn emotions of shame or fear, here negative emotions associated with distancing from the hegemonic communal identity, into anger or positive feelings, mobilising participants to join collective actions (2011: 123). This is what militants are seeking when joining an organisation:

"People are more reassured in their activism and in what they believe if they are reassured they are not crazy, not self-hating Jews. Na'amod gives us the space which is extremely reassuring in verifying this as well because there is no such thing as a good and a bad Jew, there is a Jew and a non-Jew. No matter what your position is on Israel/Palestine that does not define your Judaism. I mean when people can claim to be Jewish and not believe in God, and yet still think they are good Jews, that for me is not a problem but that distance with religion is a double-standard that is not applied with distance from Zionism. It is almost as if Zionism is the coming way to express Judaism. Spaces to express a different Judaism, and a different Jewish identity, I think it is extremely important. I am really glad I live in a time where that is possible." (Peter, 2022).

From Peter's account, one can see that finding the space to discuss Zionism critically was a relief, and also strengthen his activism. Within Na'amod, through discussions with fellow militants, he stepped from being a liberal Zionist to an anti-Zionist. In Lawrence's study, militants of Jewish organisations mentioned the importance of social networks, peer interactions and connections in fostering their participation in activism. More than providing a space for the expression of their opinions, those organisations create a new collective experience, when a previous one was eliminated (2016: 200).

This brings us to a third point. Alternative Jewish spaces are central to critical Jews who have lost a part, or the entirety of their Zionist communities to recreate a new one. Elie told

me that when he joined the UJFP, he "found a political family. Really not a movement but a family, because we were among Jews, even if not everyone is Jewish but there is this side of speaking as a Jew. Sometimes I think it's great and sometimes I'm bored with it, but it's like with family." (Elie, 2022). Later one, he also talked about the UJFP as his "only Jewish house". David did not have the same experience as, as a believer, he did not manage to find a new community in an overwhelmingly atheist organisation such as the UJFP. Indeed, UJFP was created by atheist leftist militants, and although being the largest organisation in continental Europe, it remains the only Jewish organisation in France to support Palestinian rights (Landy, 2011: 114).

Before the 2000s, and the outbreak of the second intifada, there was no Jewish organisations to oppose Israel in the United Kingdom. The situation changed when Jews for Justice for Palestinians was established in 2002 (Landy, 2011: 85). With David and Elie, we discussed the fact that the network of Jewish organisations in the USA was more developed, and therefore able to integrate young members to their activism, and to offer a wider choice of Jewish identities, from secular to religious ones. As an example, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), the biggest organisation, created a network of rabbis and cantors to support JVP and its members, and help them find synagogues reflecting their political inclinations (Lawrence, 2016: 203). While all my interviewees told me they did not seek for non-Zionist religious structures and were confident in separating religion from politics, the lack of differentiated organisations, particularly in France, does not grant them with a choice when joining the struggle against Israeli policies.

Jewish organisations advocating for Palestinian rights therefore represent central spaces for critical Jews to be reassured in their engagement, to recognise the fact that they are not the only ones within the community to hold those political opinions, and to recreate new alternative communities when previous ones were lost. However, those are not their only functions.

3. Shaping a New Collective Identity: Rebirth of Diasporism

Indeed, the Jewish social movement in solidarity with Palestinians does not only provide an alternative communal space for their militants, but is engaged in the production of a new collective identity. Diani defines a social movement as "a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity" (1992: 13). Therefore, to build itself, the movement needs to engage with the construction of a collective identity for those critical Jews, and do so through reviving the diasporist identity. Diasporism was obliterated after the Six Days war, and the massive support of diaspora Jews for the State of Israel. After the Second Intifada, the movements that competed with Zionism before World War II were regenerated by new Jewish critics of Israel (Lawrence, 2016: 194). A part of the community, revolted by the handling of the Palestinian uprisings by Israeli political and military forces started to create organisations, forged alliances with Palestinian activist

movements, join protests and publish books to relaunch the conversation on the place of Zionism within Jewish identity (see Loewenstein 2006; Marqusee 2008; Kovel 2007; Sand 2014). Landy asserts that Jewish organisations opposing Israeli policies, while pursuing a set of political objectives, seek to interrogate the meaning of being a diaspora Jew in direct contestation with the dominant Zionist discourse, and did so through reviving a universalist and diasporic identity (2011: 21). Reviving the diasporic identity has two aims: producing a political identity that can justify opposing the Zionist project and/or its consequences, and enable activists to distance themselves from a Zionist centred identity while retaining and reshaping their Jewishness.

Firstly, Landy talks about a diasporist, rather and a diasporic identity, to underline its programmatic political function. The scholar indeed argues that the diasporist identity has been shaped to be operationalised against what it opposes: the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine (2011: 40). Segal's account of her Jewish identity is a good example of this dynamic. The scholar argues that her Jewishness has never been an important identity for her as she came from a secular family and identified mainly as a socialist and a feminist. She discovered a new Jewish strategic identity when she joined Jews for Justice for Palestinians, a British organisation, upon a friend's demand, by speaking out against Israel as a Jew (Segal, 2017: 475-478).

However, Landy underlines that fact that diasporism does not only come from a revulsion of Israel's actions, but from a real feeling of being at home within the diaspora. In the last few decades, the European Jewish community was characterised by two trends: a growing detachment from Israel, and the creation of a Europeanised and diasporist vision of Jewishness (Landy, 2011: 71). Community members engaged in efforts to reproduce an alternative European Jewish identity through initiatives such as festivals, films, books, new forms of synagogues, etc. (Cohen et al., 2008: 4). Indeed, organisations like Jewdas in the UK bring alternative events to the Jewish community in London to bolster alternative identities. The organisation presents itself with the sentence "radical voices for an alternative diaspora". Landy argues that Jewdas culture-jamming activities may be the most successful attempt at bringing criticism to the community as the organisation stays firmly within the Jewish sphere rather than seeking to represent Jews to the outside world (2011: 91). The revival of a diasporist identity has proven to be inspiring for some non-Zionist Jews. One of Lawrence's interviewees, Rebecca, told him that: "there's these modes of diasporic thinking that are incredibly rich and wonderful. Jews don't need to be connected to a land. [Diasporism is] a form of self-determination and sovereignty and group identity that is incredibly rewarding" (cited by Lawrence, 2016: 203). Lawrence asserts that far from closing off the doors to Jewish communal life, engaging in activism introduce activists to new ideas and modes of being Jewish, and strengthen connections to Jewish religion, values and thinking (2016: 202).

Therefore, Jewish organisations advocating in solidarity with the Palestinians enable critical Jews to reconcile a strong Jewish identity with an opposition to Zionism, and provide a collective identity able to suit their identification needs. According to the scholar, movements' identity work

seeks to challenge the given idea according to which Jews are naturally Zionist, to create "a universalist, liberal and confidently diaspora space" which non-Zionist Jews can identify with (Landy, 2011: 123). Reviving an alternative identity enables militant to grasp a new collective identity, and to turn the negative feelings associated with their rupture from the community's agreement into a new pride. This is present in Gelman's account of coming out against the occupation:

"Jews who you'd think are fairly progressive — who have worked on labor issues, or civil rights — come down unconditionally on the side of Israel. It's like people have no Jewish identity outside of Israel, and can't tolerate seeing any imperfections. You want to shake them and say "Remember Yiddish? Remember the Diaspora? Remember the ideal of Jewish morality and commitment to justice?" (Gelman, 2002).

Jewish critical organisations, therefore, provide a framework of identification of non-Zionist Jews that enables them to be more comfortable with their political opinions. Landy argues that the movement created a new space, between the community and the civitas, a concept he takes from Melucci to describe an imagined universal civic space as opposed to bounded communal spaces (Melucci 1996: 170). This space between the universal and the community enables critical Jews to speak out against Israel, even if they do so in a constrained way (Landy, 2011: 122). Peter told me that "you need to have a framework that justify anti-Zionism, almost to rationalise the ethical, religious or political values." While he asserts that it makes a lot of sense for him to both being Jewish and anti-Zionist, he recognises that "it is definitely not something that the community is very happy with." Through creating an alternative space between the community and the universal, and reviving a collective identity, Jewish critical organisations enable non-Zionist Jews to reconcile their Jewishness and their opposition to the State of Israel. This is something that was present in David's account. As seen previously, when becoming anti-Zionist, he detached himself from his Jewishness, telling himself he was not a believer, and that Judaism was not for him anyway. Through his process of identity building, he finally came back to Judaism, and to a Jewish identity reconciled with his opposition to the Zionist project:

"At first it was in a very Marxist, internationalist way, refusing the idea of nation, thinking that it's a bourgeois voice, then more on an anti-colonialist basis and supporting the national struggle of the Palestinian people. Then later on Jewish grounds, when I reappropriated my religion, bringing it closer to Judaism, which I also made a source for my anti-Zionist commitment. The Jewish tradition does not teach this at all, even outside the theological question, but by tradition and culture, in relation to a heritage, to a respect for values and situations experienced by Jews, and which also founds for me the Jewish identity next to religion, I found that it was a complete gap. And even from an ethical and moral point of

view, if you take the Jewish morals and ethics normally there is no place for the oppression of the other and injustice, so it reinforced my anti-Zionist commitment." (David, 2022).

Elie also told me that the UJFP has been a framework where he could fully be Jewish without it being through religion, and without having to go through a full and complete adhesion to Israel, on the contrary. Finding this framework enabled him to complete his de-Zionification process. Josh told me that he maintained throughout his teenage years a defensive, combative Jewish identity that was mainly centred on fighting antisemitism, but that he now feels to the need to build a more positive Jewish identity, that is not defensive but relies more on universal concepts and on the idea of Tikkun Olam.

To conclude, the Jewish social movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people created new spaces for non-Zionist Jews to meet each other and discuss their experiences and their activism. Those spaces have proven to be highly reassuring for their militants, and have created a new collective experience. Moreover, the social movement, through a revived diasporatism, opened up new self-identification possibilities for non-Zionist Jews to reconcile their Jewishness with their political positions.

Conclusion:

This paper sought to inquire the centrality of the State of Israel in young British and French Jews' identity formation. More precisely, it aimed at offering some insights into the identification dynamics of young Jews seeking to decentre themselves from a Zionist Jewish identity. It asked itself the following question: What drives critical French and British Jewish youth's identification choices in the construction of a non-Israel centric identity?

This paper argues that young progressive Jews self-identify in a nexus between a Zionist Jewish community, and external left-wing values associated with human rights and social justice, which creates conflicting dynamics. Indeed, while a Jewish opposition to the Zionist project has always existed, before and during the existence of the State of Israel, the Jewish diaspora slowly united into support for its existence, particularly in the aftermaths of the Six Days War. Support for Israel became, in the words of Attias and Benbassa, the 'civil religion' of diaspora Jews (2003: 234). However, while the Zionist narrative became hegemonic in the Jewish world, both the State of Israel and the Jewish diaspora endured important changes. Firstly, the Israeli society dramatically shifted to the right, electing hard-line Zionist governments to pursue the colonisation of the West Bank and the harsh oppression of the Palestinian people, in all realms of lives. While diaspora Jews in the 1960s saw Israel as a state facing great threats, and possible destruction due to conflicts with its neighbours, the youngest generation, increasingly connected, is more likely to perceive the state as a violent oppressor, with a well-documented record of human rights violations denounced by international NGOs. Moreover, the Israeli society also became increasingly religious and nationalist, alienating a part of the liberal and progressive diaspora youth unable to self-identify with those norms and values. The political context in which young Jews evolve certainly holds a central position in triggering a feeling of discomfort in the way they relate to the State of Israel. Through interviewing four young militants of organisations advocating against Israeli policies, this study underlines the fact that politicisation and adherence with left-wing values, in parallel with awareness of the sufferings endured by the Palestinian people, brought by first-hand accounts or shocking experiences in Israel, triggered this youth's alienation with the Zionist project.

However, the political context is not the only characteristic driving French and British Jewish youth's identification choices. In an increasingly globalised and detraditionalised world, the Jewish diaspora is fragmenting and widening the boundaries of Jewishness and Jewish identity. Jewish youth tend to rely less on traditional communal structures in shaping their identity than their elders, to the profit of their sovereign self. This youth is comfortable in merging with other communities, navigating trans-communal spaces and seeing themselves as universal subjects. Those sociological shifts enable them to go through their own process of self-identification, and to identify with narratives produced outside the community. However, distancing themselves from the hegemonic Zionist narrative remains costly. Young progressive Jews breaking with the communal agreement

often endure important familial or friendship ruptures, and exclusion from communal spaces. While some afford the cost of aligning with their political stances, others prefer to remain cautious and fall into an uncomfortable middle ground between communal and left-wing spaces. In any case, alienation from the community often trigger an alienation from important parts of their Jewishness.

Young progressive Jews therefore attempts to navigate the space between the community and the universal world to reconcile the conflict between two self-identifications perceived as antithetical. To do so, they forge new connections, often with other alienated Jews, to share their experiences and create a new collective experience capable of converting their loss of identity into a revised Jewishness (Lawrence, 2016: 199). Jewish organisations advocating for Palestinians' rights imposed themselves as central spaces to enable the creation of a collective experience, and more importantly the construction of a narrative empowering critical Jews to oppose themselves to an Israel-centred identity while retaining their Jewish identity. This piece has argued that through reviving a diasporist identity, present in Jewish historical debates for decades, those organisations provided diaspora youth with a new space, and a new narrative for self-identification, using elements of Jewishness to strengthen their political activism and individual identities. This new narrative also made the critic of Israel increasingly acceptable among the community, and facilitated the diffusion of their message among other Jews (Landy, 2011: 80).

Therefore, while still representing a minority, dissenting voices attempting to break the Zionist consensus within the Jewish community are increasing. The combination of the rightward shift of the Israeli society, necessary to maintain the occupation and the Jewish character of the State, along with the growing liberalism, individualism and universalism of diaspora youth, might accelerate the trend in the coming decades. Disregarding this phenomenon would equate to failing the recognise the shifting character of Jewish identity in the 21st century, and its potential political consequences for the State of Israel.

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