The Hope of Marseille

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The commencement of the second Palestinian Intifada, in late 2000, ignited the most extensive outbreak of anti-Semitic violence in France since the Holocaust. It continues to this day. The crimes have been perpetrated almost entirely by the *beur*—Arab immigrants. The political alliances forged between Jewish and Arab leaders during the rise of the right-wing National Front have broken down.

Marseille, France's second-largest and oldest city, was initially not exempt. In September 2001, the Gan Pardes school in Marseille was set alight. The words "Death to the Jews" and "Bin Laden Will Conquer" were spray-painted on the walls. Over the next year, Jewish cemeteries were defaced and swastikas painted on Jewish homes. During demonstrations in support of the Palestinians, marchers shouted, "All Arabs are Palestinians! We are all suicide bombers!"

On March 31, 2002, a series of coordinated anti-Semitic attacks took place throughout France: Masked assailants smashed cars into a Lyon synagogue and set it on fire; a shotgun was fired into a kosher butcher shop in Toulouse; arsonists attempted to burn down a synagogue in Strasbourg. A Jewish couple was assaulted in a small village along the Rhone. In Marseille, the Or Aviv Synagogue in the quiet northern

neighborhood of Les Caillols was reduced to ashes by arsonists and the Tora scrolls charred.

To the bewilderment of French Jews, the Palestinian Intifada has attenuated, but the so-called French Intifada has not—except in one city. The violence in Paris, Lyon, Strasbourg, and other major French cities has continued, and in some places worsened. In these cities, anti-Semitism appears to be uncontainable. But in Marseille, the animus has fizzled out. The city reacted with revulsion to the burning of the Or Aviv Synagogue. City-wide protests against anti-Semitism were immediately organized; Arabs participated in the demonstrations. The leaders of Marseille's Islamic community firmly condemned the attack. By contrast, after similar violence in Toulouse, Muslim community leaders offered not one single gesture of solidarity.[1]

Marseille is not free of anti-Semitism, by no means; the city, after all, is the political base of the National Front, whose campaigns are driven by a furious anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic sentiment. But by comparison with the rest of France, Marseille is calm. There are no burned cars, as in Strasbourg, nor urban riots, as in Paris and Lyon. In the rest of France, the violence against Jews appears to be organized. Some Jewish leaders believe it to be centrally planned and directed, perhaps by al-Qaida cells; they note that as on March 31, 2002, similar attacks often occur in separate cities on the same day, and find improbable the claim that this is mere coincidence. In Marseille, however, what violence there is seems to be spontaneous, disorganized, and largely committed by disaffected, economically disadvantaged juveniles who spend too much time watching al-Jazeera via satellite dish.

Marseille is a city of immigrants. Fully a quarter of its population is of North African origin, and demographers predict that Marseille will be the first city on the European continent with an Islamic majority. Its Jewish community is the third-largest in Europe. The most ethnically diverse city in France, then, has paradoxically been the most successful in containing this outbreak of ethnic violence.

A few months ago, I went to Marseille to investigate this anomaly. My operating assumption was that Marseille's calm must be attributable to particularly vigorous police work. I spoke to cab drivers and waiters, to the police chief and his deputy, to street cops and to officials at city hall. I spoke to regional historians and archivists; I spoke to right-wing and left-wing community leaders. Everyone agreed that Marseille's calm was no accident. There is something unique about the city that protects it from cyclones of ethnic violence. I was told, and slowly became convinced, that the efficacy of the police was only one part of the story.

Few social phenomena have monocausal explanations, and of course there is more than one reason for Marseille's comparative tranquility. But one aspect of the answer is a surprising one: It is Marseille's approach to ethnic community politics, an approach that is unlike that of any other city in France.

This approach, in fact, challenges the core principles of the French republican ideal, and the historic concept of what it means to be French.

France's model of immigration, the so-called republican model, rests upon the demand that immigrants become culturally, intellectually, and politically assimilated. Like assimilation by the Borg, this process is *complete*: Immigrants are asked to abandon their native cultures and adopt a distinct set of mental habits, values, and shared historic memories. Taken as a whole, these habits, values, and memories—*not* shared religion, race, or blood—are held to be the essence of France, the glue that binds French citizens together.[2]

The core values of France, inherited from the French Revolution, are based on the idea of individual rights: For official France, it is the citizen who is recognized, never the ethnic group to which he belongs. When the French Revolution emancipated Protestants and Jews, it emancipated them as individual citizens, not as groups defined by their religious membership.

Related to the republican model is the doctrine of *laïcité*, a strict form of secularism that derives historically from the bitter rejection of France's authoritarian Catholicism. By this doctrine, all reference to religion must be excluded from the public sphere. In theory at least, *laïcité* guarantees equality before the law for all French citizens, and militates against anti-Semitism.

The republican model of immigration has until recently allowed France successfully and completely to assimilate wave upon wave of Celtic, Germanic, Latin, and Slavic immigrants. The process is characterized by the state's refusal legally to recognize cultural and ethnic minorities, the official denial of the very idea of cultural identity. Similar principles were applied as well in the former French colonies, often to peculiar effect: I have spoken to Cameroonians who recall opening their first history text as children and reading with bewilderment the book's opening lines: *Nos ancêtres, les gallois*....

Integration in France supposes an implied contract between the immigrant and the nation. The immigrant agrees to respect the universalist values of the republic, and the republic in turn guarantees his children full integration and social standing. Finance Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, the son of a Hungarian immigrant, is an excellent case in point. In one generation, Sarkozy—who is of Jewish extraction—has come to dominate French political life. He has done so by being more French, more committed to republican values, even sounding more French, than any of his adversaries. He is widely expected to become France's next prime minister.

The American and Anglo-Saxon models of immigration rest upon significantly different principles and traditions. Britain and the United States both emerged as federations of smaller states; and in both societies there is a looser and more pragmatic relationship between citizens and the center, a greater devolution of authority to local governance. In consequence, Britain does not merely tolerate immigrants speaking their own languages and worshipping their own gods, it encourages them. London's Muslim Welfare House, for example, subsidized by a grant from the British

government, offers Koranic study and lessons in Arabic. The United States enforces multiculturalism with affirmative action programs backed by the full weight of the law. At every level of society, Americans are exhorted to celebrate diversity.

The French government vigorously rejects this kind of cultural separatism, which it terms "communitarianism." The word connotes the intrusion of unseemly religious or ethnic particularism into the public sphere, a refusal to be assimilated. The debate over the veil is emblematic. The French government has banned the veil in the classroom. In Britain, the issue is viewed as a matter for schools to resolve individually and independently of the government. In the United States, the Justice Department has intervened to protect the right of students to wear the veil in class.

When Arab immigrants in France insist upon sending their daughters to school in a veil—or when they torch synagogues, for that matter—the French government interprets these unwelcome events through this framework. The malefactors, they sense uneasily, are not taking a shine to republicanism.

I arrived in Marseille on a sweltering summer afternoon. From the train station I could see Marseille's roseate castle glowing against the sunbaked Provençal hills. It was too hot to move quickly. Marseille is a city made for siestas. I walked slowly down the hill to the Canebière, the tree-lined street that leads to the old port. The cafés were filled with dark-skinned men, their faces lined from the sun; they were first-generation immigrants, to judge from the sartorial clues. They wore clothes few native Europeans would wear—button-down shirts with short sleeves, dress slacks pressed with unfashionable care. Some had missing teeth and some had gold teeth; many had mustaches. They were sitting quietly with their hands folded, marking time, or filling in racing forms while drinking their coffee and chatting in Arabic. There were few women in the cafés, although there were many on the streets, dark-skinned and sloe-eyed. Some were veiled, but most were wearing skimpy tank tops and low-rise jeans. They were, after all, in France,

and it was the revealing dress of the women, above all, that made Marseille feel more like a European city than an Oriental one.

I found a hotel on the Canebière, run by a family of Maghrebis, then took a taxi to the industrial northern neighborhood where I was to meet Zvi Ammar, the president of the Jewish Consistory of Marseille. "It's true that in Marseille we get along," my cab driver told me. "I'm a Jew, my neighbors, they're Arabs, we understand each other fine... it's not like the rest of France. We're cosmopolitan here, everyone understands everyone else." But when I asked him why, he couldn't tell me. "I'm not very political. I don't know. It's just the way it is. We have the sunshine here, the port." The sunshine and the port: Everyone mentioned that. But if sunshine and ports were a recipe for peace, Lebanon would be a paradise.

Ammar was born and raised in Djerba, Tunisia, but betrayed the influence of the French educational system the moment he opened his mouth. The clue was his love of the schema. He approached the problem of anti-Semitism in France by breaking it into subsets; he labeled and defined those subsets, then presented his conclusions in a well-rehearsed lecture. "For four years," he told me, "the Jewish community of France has suffered from acts of an anti-Semitic character. These acts have two forms: There are acts against the dead, and there are acts against the living. Acts against the dead are committed by the extreme Right. Neo-Nazis attack cemeteries and blaspheme tombs, defacing them with swastikas, Celtic crosses, and references to Hitler. The forensic signature of a neo-Nazi attack is the artwork. Their swastikas are carefully drawn and perfectly even."

We were interrupted by his mobile phone. Ammar is fluent in French, Hebrew, and Arabic, and during our conversation took calls in all three languages. After hurling rapid-fire Arabic down the phone for a few minutes, he hung up and returned to his exposition. "The attacks against the living are committed by Maghrebis—mostly youths. They now commit about 90 percent of the anti-Semitic crimes in France. When Maghrebis draw swastikas, they are careless. Their artwork is sloppy and childish."

The French intellectual system, I thought while listening to him, does indeed have a striking power to take over the souls of men and women whose native culture encourages forms of reflection as far from the French model as it is possible to get. When a man becomes French—that is, when he is *educated* in the French manner—he begins to think like a Frenchman. *The problem has three parts, the solution has four. State, expand, schematize, analyze, conclude*. It has been so since Descartes.

Ammar agreed that Marseille had been spared the worst of the French Intifada. "We've been a bit luckier here," he said. One reason for this is that Marseille has benefited from vigorous police work. This is not unique to Marseille, but has been particularly effective there. In France, all law-enforcement initiatives are coordinated at the national level, not the city level. The government of President Jacques Chirac, under Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, has taken aggressive measures to combat anti-Semitism. Following the attack on Marseille's Or Aviv Synagogue, the government deployed riot troops to every place in Marseille where Jews congregated. Outside Marseille's synagogues, a heavy and visible police presence remains to this day. The police have worked in close coordination with the domestic intelligence services, which have ramped up their surveillance of mosques and Islamic radical cells. The government has set up a toll-free number for Marseille's Jews to call; they have asked Jews to use it to report even the smallest aggression, such as casual insults on the street, so that officials may better spot trends and deploy resources to emerging hot spots. The police have been instructed to treat complaints of harassment with the utmost seriousness.

Foreign intellectuals and journalists have been quick to charge French officials with pusillanimity in responding to domestic anti-Semitism, arguing that the government has chosen to appease France's large, Left-leaning Muslim population rather than protect its numerically smaller Jewish constituency. The Jewish leaders to whom I spoke in Marseille rejected this, insisting that Chirac's response to domestic anti-Semitism has been appropriate and forceful.

While France's socialists and leftists, I was told, had been "in denial" about the problem, the current administration was not. All agreed that Lionel Jospin's Socialist government, which lost power to the conservative UMP in 2002, had responded tepidly to the mounting crisis. They had been ideologically blinkered, Ammar reasoned. "They didn't believe we could speak of racism that came from the Maghreb community, which was itself victimized by racism. For the Left, this was an earthquake." The Left held France's Jews and Arabs to be natural class and ideological allies. Until recently, this was not so absurd as it sounds: In response to the rise of the National Front in the 1980s, Jews and Arabs united to form the pressure group SOS Racisme. Although allegedly apolitical, its leaders were close to important politicians of the Socialist Party. "No one else in France," Ammar said, "had helped the Muslim community more than us, the Jews—through organizations like SOS Racisme—all the founding members of that organization were Jews. We were highly sensitive to their suffering."

The national, coordinated violence on the day of the torching of Marseille's Or Aviv Synagogue was a turning point, proof that the violence was not, as the Socialists believed, a transient problem or an expression of trivial juvenile delinquency. After this, the Chirac government moved swiftly and aggressively. Pierre Lellouche, a prominent security politician, sponsored legislation, the Lellouche Law, which came into effect in February 2003. The law called for the doubling of punishments for crimes committed with a racist or anti-Semitic motive, and was approved with rare unanimity in both the National Assembly and the Senate. French police delegations were sent to New York to study Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's zero-tolerance policy. Sarkozy, then the interior minister, briefed police officials on the Lellouche Law; referring to its double-punishment proviso, he announced that France would now adopt a *double* zero-tolerance policy toward anti-Semitic crime, a forceful if mathematically problematic declaration. He formed a new police unit to investigate these incidents. Demonstrators were banned from displaying swastikas or other anti-Semitic symbols.

Not one person in Marseille complained to me that Paris or the police were indifferent to attacks on Jews, or that official policy was tainted by any kind of anti-Semitism, subtle or unsubtle. "France is not an anti-Semitic country," Ammar insisted. "An anti-Semitic country has anti-Semitic policies, like Vichy, with its anti-Semitic laws. Here it is the contrary. *The contrary*. We must speak the truth. You cannot say that because there are anti-Semitic acts, France is an anti-Semitic country." Ammar did complain, however, that the judiciary had been slow to implement the Lellouche Law and to incarcerate offenders; this, he believed, was because the judiciary, reflecting the views of the French public at large, was not yet prepared to accept the gravity of France's problem. Others to whom I spoke in Marseille had a different perspective on the judiciary's apparent faineancy: Officials within the police force and at city hall held that the likely explanation was not indifference to the seriousness of the crimes; rather, most of the offenders have been juveniles, and the French legal system, in a long-standing tradition, is particularly protective of minors.

Ammar lunches regularly with members of Chirac's inner circle. Official France, Ammar believed, was shaken to the core by the rise in anti-Semitism. "We, the Jews, we're used as a kind of barometer. We may only be 1 percent of the population, but they know that if they are allowed to attack us, tomorrow they will go much, much further. A politician told me last week, 'You, the Jews, you're French here in France, it's your country, but if there's trouble tomorrow, you have Israel. Us? Where will we go? Nowhere. We don't know where to go.'" Even ministers widely seen as sympathetic to Arab grievances were profoundly alarmed. "I met Dominique de Villepin two weeks ago. He, minister of the interior, responsible for security, boss of the French police, he told me, '*Monsieur Ammar, le pire n'est pas derrière nous. Il est devant nous*.' The worst is not behind us. It is ahead of us."

The government was doing all it could, Ammar believed. But the problem, he thought, was that the minds of Arab youths in France had been bathed in ravening hatred by broadcasts from the Middle East, from

al-Jazeera and from al-Manar, the Hezbollah propaganda station. "The images, the music, the speeches—they are all designed to incite to the maximum, to make you want to go out in the street and find Jews to kill." In almost every Arab home, there is a satellite dish. "Sincerely, I am telling you: I don't see how you can put a policeman behind every Jew. It's not possible."

Perhaps. Yet, as he agreed, France's new law enforcement initiatives had been more successful in Marseille than the rest of France. Clearly there *are* solutions. But why should police tactics that have failed in other French cities be more effective in Marseille?

Seeking an answer, I took this question to those I thought might know: Marseille's police.

I spent the following day at the National Police Equipment Convention of France. Some thousand-odd police officers had arrived for the outdoor event, held in a leafy Marseille suburb under the bright sky of a Mediterranean summer. Between the demonstrations of new police gear and tactics, I sat at a lawn table shaded by a parasol, amid big bushes of pink flowers, and spoke to the cops who patrol Marseille's streets. I started by speaking to two of them, but soon others, overhearing our discussion, sat down: They all wanted their say. Before long, a dozen cops were sitting at the table. Marseille, they agreed, was different; it was cosmopolitan; it was a port; ethnic conflict was not as much of a problem as it was in other cities. But that didn't mean the place wasn't a mess. "There are neighborhoods we can't even enter," one told me.

"There's no respect for the police anymore," another added.

"Kids these days don't have a good upbringing. They don't respect anything."

"We don't have enough money. We need more money."

"Are you going to talk to Sarkozy? Tell him we need more money."

Cops, everywhere—the same complaints.

Of the cops at the table, about half were white. There was one black

man, and the rest looked as if they might be of North African origin. There were two women. I asked whether the police force made an effort to hire ethnic minorities, as it did in the United States.

"Oh yes, of course."

"But not officially. You can't do that officially. That's against republicanism."

"But unofficially—of course!"

Everyone in official France, from top to bottom, knows the party line: *We are a republic. There are no ethnic groups.* But everyone, I discovered, also knows that this is a fraud.

I spent the rest of the day looking for Marseille's police chief, Pierre Carton. I spotted him just as a gigantic, flame-red police helicopter swooped down from the sky. The special forces had arrived to rappel down the side of a four-story building. I had to shout to make myself heard, because the loudspeakers were now blasting the theme from "The Ride of the Valkyries." The chief was beaming: He was proud of his men. He kindly suggested that we might be able to talk more comfortably in his office, and invited me to join him there later in the afternoon.

The police station was massive, with the atmosphere and architecture of a Saracen fort, and the chief's office was spacious and sunny. "There's been tension since the beginning of the Second Intifada in Israel, yes," said Carton in response to my question, "but not a *débordement*—an overflow. It's not like other cities." He was modest about this achievement: "If we've had any success, it's very relative. It's owed, in part, to the geography and sociology of the city. Marseille is a city with space. It's an agglomeration of what we call village nuclei, small neighborhoods that form a complete fabric. What's particularly important is that the *banlieue* is in the city itself." In other French cities, the *banlieue*—the suburbs—form menacing rings of criminality and unemployment around the city. This was a common theme of my conversations in Marseille: The city owes its peace, in part, to the fact that immigrants have not been shunted off into suburban slums as they have been in other large French cities.

Marseille is particularly spread out. Its 800,000 inhabitants enjoy a city twice the size of Paris, with a coastline that spans more than 35 miles. The population of greater Paris, by contrast, is 10.5 million. During the 1960s and 1970s, when France launched huge collective housing projects, Marseille benefited from these reserves of space. Immigrant neighborhoods are now distributed evenly throughout the city, and young people, whatever their ethnic origin, congregate in the same neighborhoods: The Vieux Port, the Canebière, St. Ferréol Street, the beaches of the Prado, the Velodrome. This use of urban space is uniquely Marseillais. In Nice, Montpellier, Bordeaux, Paris, and other major cities, youths of foreign origin and the native-born do not socialize in the same places. This, clearly, is an important reason for Marseille's comparative calm.

His deputy agreed: "This is important. The projects aren't detached from the rest of the city or from its traditional structures. The fact that the projects are sprinkled through the city means the inhabitants don't feel cut off from civic life or the traditional life of the city. If they use public transport, kids from the projects can be in the center of town within five minutes."

I asked the chief whether Marseille's policing tactics, at the street level, had changed significantly under Chirac. Absolutely, he said; under the Socialists they had been crippled, but now the power of the police had been unleashed. Encouraged by signals from the Chirac government, he now responded to minor anti-Semitic crimes with a "furious" display of force—something he felt unable to do in the political climate of the Jospin era. "During the Socialist era, between 1981 and 1986, the organization of the police was a bit different. We had less power at our disposal for a strong reaction—police power was spread out. Now it's been regrouped. Now we have forces that can respond quickly and forcefully. This was a national initiative, but it suits us well here.

"The mentality is different now. We try to be visible. We try to be very present in difficult areas. That frightens the delinquents and reassures the honest people. That's been our policy for the past few years. Now, even small

aggression, verbal aggression, is punished. Because that's where it starts. We try to react quickly. If you leave it, if you don't react, it degenerates rapidly. We want to avoid having others get the same idea, because here you have young people watching things on television, images of the Intifada... we make arrests to show it won't be tolerated." He was quick, however, to specify that these were *republican* arrests, not communitarian arrests. "In France, we arrest individuals—it's *you* who threw a stone at me, not the group to which you belong.

"Our model here isn't repression, though," he added. "It's permanent contacts among groups, in the schools, among associations. The police have a permanent dialogue with neighborhood associations—when there's a problem, we go directly to the source. We have personal relationships with the Jewish community, with the Islamic community. We have personal contacts at many levels: Not only the chiefs, but the cops on patrol have regular meetings with community representatives. Not only with religious leaders but with ethnic leaders."

This was a significant admission, and he caught himself: "But we keep this within the republican framework, not the communitarian one."

It was not at all clear to me what this might mean: How can you have relations with the Islamic community without acknowledging that there *is* such a thing as an Islamic community? As I was later to conclude, the remarkable thing about Marseille is that its politics are, in fact, highly communitarian. Everyone simply insists vocally that they are not, as if this made it so.

Marseille's success in avoiding the extremes of ethnic tension seen in other French cities was not, Carton freely offered, entirely attributable to his aggressive police work, although this was clearly part of the story. The reasons for the city's exceptionalism were manifold. "There's the climate. There are lots of leisure activities. The beach is free. Hiking is free. You don't have to spend money to have pleasure. If you're in Paris and you don't have money to go to restaurants, you're excluded. We're unique here. We have youth centers for kids from difficult neighborhoods—sports, boating. And

then there's the soccer team: That really unites people. All colors, they call out, 'We're Marseillais.' It crosses all borders. They don't say, 'We're *beurs*,' they say, 'We're Marseillais.'

"We have normal delinquency," the chief reflected, "but yes, ideological crime is marginal. We have traditional crime—French Connection crime."

I was later to realize that Marseille's tradition of French Connection crime had more relevance to its present calm than one might suspect.

A historical interlude. Marseille is a merchant port, northern Europe's natural outlet to the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal, a corridor between Orient and Occident. Its identity is, and has always been, intimately bound with immigration. In the seventh century B.C.E. the chief of the landing Phoenician galleys—a man said to be handsome as a god—married the daughter of the king of the local Ligurian tribe. The city's origins are thus with a mixed couple, one native, one foreign.

According to Herodotus, Phoenician inhabitants took refuge in Marseille, then Massalia, when the Persians destroyed Phocaea. Then as now, the city was a haven for immigrants. Greeks, Romans, Genoans, Spaniards, Levantines, Venetians—all have come to Marseille and stayed. Each decade since the turn of the century has seen the arrival of tens of thousands of immigrants, most of them refugees: Armenian survivors of the Turkish genocide, German and Polish Jews, Republicans escaping the civil war in Spain, Vietnamese, Cambodians. The decolonization of the Maghreb brought a massive influx of North Africans to the city, giving it its nickname—the capital of Africa.

The exact religious composition of Marseille is unknown, for French law prohibits census-taking—the very act is considered antithetical to republicanism. By informal estimates, there are 190,000 Muslims, divided among 70,000 Algerians, 30,000 Tunisians, and 15,000 Moroccans. There are nearly 70,000 Comorians, making Marseille the second-largest Comorian city in the world. Muslims from black Africa number between 5,000

and 7,000. There are at least 65,000 Armenian churchgoers, 20,000 Buddhists, and tens of thousands of Orthodox Greeks.

Marseille's 80,000 Jews constitute 10 percent of the total population, their ranks swollen by Algerian repatriation. The presence of Jews in Marseille can be traced at least to the sixth century: Jews arrived in 574, fleeing forced conversion in Clermont-Ferrand. In 1484 and early 1485, shortly after the incorporation of Provence into France, the Jewish quarter of Marseille was plundered. Jews were murdered and the survivors fled, only to return after the expulsion of Spanish Jewry in 1492. In the seventeenth century Jews were expelled. They returned in 1760.

Between 1940 and 1942, Europe's Jews again sought sanctuary in Marseille, then in the Free Zone. Under the Occupation, they were viciously hunted, arrested, and deported. The dapper New York intellectual Varian Fry came to Marseille to lead the most successful private rescue operation of the Second World War, saving as many as two thousand Jews, among them Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, Jacques Lipchitz, Hannah Arendt, Heinrich Mann, Franz Werfel, and Alma Mahler Werfel. Of course, he could not save them all. The synagogue on the Rue de Breteuil was pillaged and its façade destroyed, the prayer books and the Tora scrolls burned. When the Germans left the city, perhaps five thousand Jews remained. They rebuilt the community and the synagogue.

Observers have long found Marseille's flamboyantly diverse population alarming: In 1936, Henri Béraud remarked in *La Gerbe* that inroads to the city had been

> transformed into giant sewers, a growing, crawling, fetid bog running over our land. It is this immense flood of Neapolitan filth, of Levantine rags, of sad, stinking Slavs, of dreadful, miserable Andalusians, the seed of Abraham and the asphalt of Judaea... doctrinaire ragheads, moth-eaten Polacks, bastards of the ghettos, smugglers of weapons, desultory *pistoleros*, spies, usurers, gangsters, merchants of women and cocaine, they arrive preceded by their odor and escorted by their germs....[3]

But the inhabitants of Marseille have historically taken pride in the city's vulgar cosmopolitanism, and its immigrants have always been politically powerful. The city has 2,600 years of experience with ethnic diversity, and it has developed strategies to cope with it. These strategies have not always been pretty, but they have worked.

Make no mistake, these strategies have not conformed to the official republican doctrine of France. Far from it. Marseille, autonomous until conquered by Charles of Anjou in the thirteenth century, was not bequeathed to the French crown until 1481, and has in some ways *never* become a fully assimilated French city. It is no great secret that its central political tradition, the one that sets it apart from the rest of France, is its exceptional corruption. Particularly, Marseille has notoriously tolerated crooked alliances between its city officials and its ethnic community leaders. Immigrant groups have flourished under this system of patronage and clientelism, one that has shored up rigged electoral agreements while governing the distribution of subsidies and favors.

As a result of this tradition, local politicians have traditionally cultivated strong personal relationships with the leaders of Marseille's various ethnic groups. During the Depression, for example, the mobsters Paul Bonnaventure Carbone and François Spirito—a Corsican and a Sicilian—achieved an understanding with Marseille's fascist deputy mayor, Simon Sabiani. By making Carbone's brother the director of the municipal stadium, Sabiani opened municipal employment to Marseille's Corsicans and Sicilians. In return, the enterprising mobsters organized a shock corps to lead fascist street demonstrations and, when asked, to give squirrelly leftist dockworkers and union members a good public thumping. Curiously, this corrupt and personal political tradition appears to have evolved into a mechanism for managing contemporary ethnic conflict. It is called Marseille Espérance.

Marseille Espérance—The Hope of Marseille—was inaugurated in 1990 by Mayor Robert Vigouroux and formally institutionalized by the current mayor, Jean-Claude Gaudin. Funded by city hall, Marseille

Espérance unites the city's religious leaders around the mayor in a regular discussion group. Everyone I spoke to in Marseille, unanimously, pointed to the organization as key to the city's social harmony, and when I protested that this seemed unlikely, they told me I was wrong. "Marseille Espérance is *very* important," the police chief said. "For unity. As soon as there's a crisis, they calm things, they issue communiqués—they are seen together. It's symbolic, seeing them together, the rabbi, the preacher, the mufti."

Vigouroux created the group specifically to stave off ethno-religious conflict between Jews and Muslims. The extreme Right had recently placed strongly in the polls. Conflict was mounting over the construction of a central mosque in the city. Passions were inflamed by the Gulf War. The idea behind Marseille Espérance was simple: Each of the city's religious communities would send a delegate to the group, which would meet regularly to discuss civic problems, to "combat intolerance, ignorance, and incomprehension" and "promote respect for one another."

In the tradition of the city, the mayor maintains strong *personal* relationships with each member of the group. Whenever tension threatens to rise—for example, after the burning of the Or Aviv Synagogue, and at the beginning of recent hostilities in Iraq—the group meets, and at the mayor's urging makes some kind of very public display of solidarity. Islamic leaders were present for the burial of the charred Tora scrolls; they were photographed comforting Jewish religious leaders, standing with them arm in arm. This occurred in no other French city. Members of Marseille Espérance have taken trips to the Western Wall. They have hosted conferences and visits from such figures as the Dalai Lama, Elie Wiesel, and the Patriarch of Constantinople. An intercommunity gala is held annually. The organization is so widely held to be effective that government delegations from Brussels, Anvers, Sarajevo, Barcelona, Naples, Turin, and Montréal have come to study it.

It is entirely counterintuitive that Marseille Espérance should work at all. I would scarcely expect a symbolic and powerless group dedicated to "combating intolerance and ignorance" to be so effective, or even to be

perceived as so effective. But the faith placed in this group by everyone in Marseille was unexpected and even touching. It was the first thing everyone mentioned to me in our discussions, held out as a model for other cities, offered as proof that if only people would just get together and listen to one another respectfully, strife and violence around the world could be resolved.

I am instinctively chary of bodies that, like the League of Nations, appeal to noble principles with no will or mechanism to impose their fine ideals at the barrel of a gun, and refused at first to believe that this group could truly be any kind of key to the city's comparative exemption from ethnic tension. But presented with example after example of Marseille Espérance's civilizing influence, I was forced to conclude there was something to it. When Ibrahim Ali, a young Comorian, was killed by neo-Nazis, the mayor gathered the delegates of Marseille Espérance and enjoined them to pacify the community. They did so. They did so again when a young Frenchman, Nicolas Bourgat, was stabbed to death by a Moroccan immigrant. Marseille Espérance convened at city hall after September 11. Standing by the mayor and the chief of police, the group issued a passionate communiqué denouncing religious fanaticism; again, tensions in the city subsided. They convened at the commencement of recent hostilities in Iraq; afterward, at the urging of the mayor, the Muslim delegates returned to their mosques and called for calm. Other Muslim clerics throughout France used this occasion to incite a frenzy of anti-American and anti-Semitic bloodlust.

The crucial point is not whether it works—it does seem to—but *why* it works. Although no one will admit it, Marseille Espérance is a political sleight-of-hand. It is, in effect, an end run around the government's anti-communitarian principles. The violence now emerging from Islamic immigrants and directed toward Jews represents a breakdown in the republican scheme: Certain Muslim immigrants are proving inassimilable; ethnic identity politics are proving stronger than the republican ideal. Of course, it is crucial to stress that only a small fraction of France's Muslims are

committing these crimes; the vast majority are peaceful citizens, prepared and even eager to be assimilated. But a stubbornly inassimilable rump remains, and it is causing a great deal of grief. The reasons for this defy facile explanation. Part of the problem, certainly, is that Islam's teachings comprise a political program as well as a religious one: Secularism and *laïcité* are not readily reconciled with Islam's insistence on the convergence—the identity, even—of the political and devotional realms.[4] The French government has no real idea what to do about this. There is no tradition, in France as a whole, of managing immigrants who cannot or will not assimilate. But in Marseille, there is.

Since the law forbids the recognition of ethnicity, the city recognizes religions—ethnicity by proxy. Marseille Espérance facilitates the emergence of personalities who represent whole ethnic groups and who forge links between their communities and the rest of the city. It affords Arabs—as Muslims—representation *as a group* in city politics. By means of their strong connection to the mayor's office, community leaders have effectively been able to promote an Islamic agenda. They have secured, for example, elaborate slaughter facilities for the ritual animal sacrifice of Eid-el-Kebir and gravesites for Muslims in the Aygalades Cemetery. Negotiations for the construction of a central mosque and an Islamic cultural center in Marseille are under way. In return, the mayor demands that Islamic leaders keep the extremists in their community in check. Here we see the old Marseille tradition: One hand washes the other.

Nothing like Marseille Espérance exists in other French cities. Whatever community leaders and politicians may say—and all will deny it; it is heresy to endorse communitarianism in France—Marseille Espérance institutionalizes and strengthens communitarian politics, and, by bringing religion to the forefront of the political sphere, directly contravenes the ideal of *laïcité*. It affords official recognition to personalities who act publicly in the name of their cultural and ethnic communities and who have the power to bring the members of those communities into line. In other words, a system born

of Marseille's traditions of patronage and corruption—a tradition entirely antithetical to France's republican ideals—now helps to keep the peace.

It's a gift to Marseille from the mob.

The mayor, as a personality, is central to this delicately balanced communitarian ecosystem. In an adroit piece of political jujitsu, Jean-Claude Gaudin defeated the National Front in 1995 while simultaneously putting the Left out of power for the first time since 1953. He is notably one of the most philo-Semitic politicians in France, and a committed Zionist. His official visit to Israel in early 2004 took him to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, and Maaleh Adumim, the largest settlement in the West Bank. There he declared that "Israeli land must not be given to others." "Speak not of colonies," he added, "but of constructions." On the same trip, he remarked that he had come to appreciate the strategic significance of the Golan Heights. Later, on French radio, he insisted that the settlements were "villas, not shantytowns." He stressed to assembled Israeli reporters that he favored the transfer of the French Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. His philo-Semitism has carried over to the city's politics: He is known for his alacrity in responding to anti-Semitic incidents; when hostile graffiti is reported, for example, it is always removed within the hour. He sends his own services to clean it. This is not true in other French cities; recently, for example, in Perpignan, I found fading anti-Semitic graffiti—*Juden raus!*—scrawled on the walls of a children's playground; it had clearly been there for quite some time.

Was the mayor a sincere Zionist, I wondered, or was this mere posturing, a quid pro quo in exchange for the electoral support of Marseille's Jews? I put this question to his deputy mayor, Daniel Sperling, who is also a prominent member of Marseille's Jewish community. "When a mayor takes an interest in Israel," he replied, "of course it's because he's interested in Jews in France. But the mayor is sincere. First of all, he's a practicing Catholic, he comes from the Christian Democratic tradition.... The mayor, like Chirac

and other members of the Right, has always sincerely admired Israel, the way it was created, the way it works, as a political project, how they transformed the land given them after the Balfour Declaration by means of a strong ideology.... The mayor has always been, how to say it, more than respectful. Impressed by the way the Jews have always conducted themselves."

A sincere Zionist, then.

"But until a certain time, he confused Israel and the Jews. Up to a point. It's okay, he understands now. He's an old politician; he's seventy-five years old, he's been in politics for twenty-five years, and for him, Israel *was* the Jews. A few times, talking to Jews of Marseille, he called Israel 'your country....'"

This is quite a fundamental error. To suggest that French Jews are not fully French is not republican at all. Even the mayor of Marseille—and perhaps especially the mayor of Marseille—seems something less than completely committed to this principle.

I wondered to what extent the mayor's public kinship with Israel and Jews was related to Marseille's comparative calm. Had he set the tone for the city? Had he obliquely sent a message to its Arab population that violence against Jews would not be tolerated? "Of course. The mayor is impressed by zero-tolerance, by the example of New York," Sperling said. But he seemed to think the key point was not so much that the mayor had reached out to Marseille's Jews, but that the Jews had reached out to the mayor. "I organized the mayor's last trip to Israel. I'm a member of the many Jewish associations here. For more than thirty years I've been part of the community. I know it by heart.

"But," he quickly added, "my power isn't about lobbying, like in the United States. We don't have anything like AIPAC. That doesn't exist here, it's not organized like that. It's *more* effective here because it's more discreet, and secret." Sperling presents himself as a superbly articulate, polished politician, so I was surprised that he was willing so freely to admit that Jews exercise covert control over Marseille's politics. The claim seemed both indiscreet and inconsistent with the principle of republicanism—although

completely consistent with everything else I was learning about Marseille. "There are many people here who want to kill me for it, of course," he added. I chuckled politely, then realized he wasn't joking.

Sperling held that despite the way it sounded, the fashion in which he represented his community to the mayor was not a form of communitarianism. "Jews aren't a lobby group here the way they are in the United States. That's not in the statutory law of France, of the republic. I am *against* communitarianism. I am a French elected official who happens to be Jewish. But I fight communitarianism. I am part of the French republic. I am elected for all the citizens. That's my personal path. When there are Jewish demonstrations in Marseille, I send a non-Jew to talk to them. Always. So that non-Jews see."

Of late, Sperling allowed, there has been a bit of a problem. Local Muslims recently elected the radical cleric Mourad Zerfaoui to the presidency of the Regional Muslim Council, and Zerfaoui is not much of a team player. In fact, Zerfaoui is such an extremist—he has condemned Marseille's other Muslim leaders as "puppets who move in the hands of the West and America"—that the mayor's office has no idea how to deal with him, and thus does not. I seized upon this tidbit with interest, wondering if it suggested the limits to the mayor's patience with community politics. I asked Sperling if I might be permitted to speak to the mayor himself. He told me that I could submit my questions to the mayor in writing. I did so, asking—innocently enough, I thought—whether the mayor's refusal to engage with Zerfaoui contravened the spirit of Marseille Espérance.

To my astonishment, I received a ferocious scolding. My question had been, Sperling said, impertinent and inappropriate. To propose that the mayor was snubbing Zerfaoui, he said, amounted to a declaration of *war*, suggesting as it did that the mayor might be *un raciste*.

I was flummoxed: What on earth was he talking about? At last, he suffered himself to pass me to the mayor's spokeswoman, Marie-Noëlle Mivielle. She, too, was in a lather about my impertinent question. "It's not the mayor who refuses to speak to Zerfaoui," she insisted emphatically. "It's

Zerfaoui who will not return *his* calls." She stressed to me that the mayor had done *so much* for Marseille's Islamic community, he had made *such efforts* to organize planning for the construction of a central mosque, he'd lent *such support* to the enlargement of existing mosques, he had even made available a multipurpose room for Muslim cultural activities. Of course, I said soothingly, of course. Of course he cares. I would never dream of suggesting otherwise.

I am not truly sure what this bizarre incident represents, but I suspect it signifies the degree to which communitarian politics have come to dominate Marseille's civic life. The mayor so fears the appearance of excluding *anyone* that I managed to violate every protocol just by suggesting that he might be. I have never before witnessed such defensiveness about an official's commitment to ethnic outreach—not even on an American university campus. And that's saying something.

I stopped in the Internet café below my hotel each morning to check my e-mail, where ads in the window advertised cheap long-distance rates to Algeria, Morocco, the Comoro Islands. When I entered the address of my e-mail server, I noticed the sites checked by patrons before me: www.aljazeera.com. The home page of the Islamic Association for Palestine. These addresses were intermingled with pornography: www.swapyourwife.com. No one looked at anything else. This vivid illustration of the chief concerns of Marseille's exogenous population made the city's harmony seem all the more striking to me. It could so easily be otherwise.

Of course, Marseille is not a pluralistic utopia. While there is less anti-Semitic tension in Marseille than in other comparable French cities, there is tension nonetheless. Yet the fact remains that in Marseille, unlike other French cities, the worst of the tension has been dampened. It was not too difficult to dampen it: A show of force from the cops, a few calming words from the local mufti, a symbolic meeting of the local religious leaders,

and Marseille returned to its usual preoccupations—the soccer team, the sun, the sea. However tempting it is to ridicule the exaggerated political correctness emanating from the mayor's office, it is only honest to concede that they are clearly doing something right.

As Europe's demography changes, ethnic conflict in European cities will continue to grow. What reflections on this problem are prompted by the curious case of Marseille? It is, obviously, an advertisement for strong police work—a strategy combining New York-style zero-tolerance with personal relationships between law enforcement and ethnic community leaders. Marseille is a rebuke to a housing policy that in the rest of France has shunted immigrants to the city periphery. It is an endorsement of social programs that give kids something benign and inexpensive to do.

But most significantly, Marseille is a challenge to the French republican ideal. Marseille functions in large part because its constituent ethnicities, particularly its Arab immigrants, are recognized, organized, courted, and given voice in a formal system. Although everyone in France extols the principle of republicanism, Marseille, by compromising that principle, is the only city in France that has kept the Intifada at bay.

In admiring this achievement, I am in no way endorsing the kind of freewheeling multiculturalism that is, in effect, nihilistic moral relativism. There is a difference between observing that it is a good idea to give ethnic groups a vehicle by which to express themselves politically and declaring that *anything* these ethnic groups want or do is acceptable. The idea is to compromise, and the point of that compromise is not ideological but pragmatic: An absolutely uncompromising attitude toward ethnicity, it would seem, disheartens moderates and encourages extremists. By giving certain groups a formal means to express a reasonable and moderate ethnic agenda, the violent and immoderate elements of that group may more readily be contained by the moderate ones, who have been co-opted into the system. Indeed, France's innovative finance minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, has obviously grasped this point: During his tenure as interior minister, Sarkozy negotiated with France's moderate Muslim leaders to create the French

Muslim Council, the first representative body of French Muslims to be formally recognized by the government. The council will, among other things, secure chaplaincies in the army and prisons, acquire Muslim burial sites, deliver halal meat certificates, and build—with the government's financial support—mosques and prayer halls. "What we should be afraid of," Sarkozy has said, "is Islam gone astray, garage Islam, basement Islam, underground Islam." He is right.

A tradition of corrupt politics is certainly *not* a precondition for the establishment of systems like Marseille's in other cities. All that is required are civic leaders committed to creating and strengthening the city's relationships with ethnic community leaders. Organizations modeled on Marseille Espérance could be created and maintained, with relatively small investment, in any European city. They might work. They are certainly worth trying.

Anything is worth trying. If immigrants cannot be assimilated and they cannot be sent back, France must find some way to make its peace with them. If not, as Villepin remarked, the worst is not behind them. It is ahead of them.

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Notes

1. It is difficult to establish, statistically, the degree to which Marseille is different from other French cities. Groups that compile statistics on anti-Semitism in France use different methods, and moreover compile these figures to different political ends. Consequently, numbers vary wildly: For example, in 2001, SOS Racisme claimed there were 405 anti-Semitic incidents in France, the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France reported 330, the Interior

Ministry 163, and the Consultative Commission on the Rights of Man 146. To confuse the methodological issue further, statistics generally reflect absolute numbers of incidents in a city, rather than per capita incidents, and do not take into account the size of a city's Jewish population. A city with 10,000 Jews is apt to report more anti-Semitic crime than a city with 10 Jews, but this does not necessarily mean Jews in the first city are in greater danger. Finally, it is particularly difficult to distinguish between a crime wave and a crime reporting wave: The French government, in its campaign to combat anti-Semitism, has encouraged Jews to report even the smallest incident of aggression; this policy has been pursued particularly vigorously in Marseille. But an increase in reported crime does not necessarily entail that real crime has increased. My claim that anti-Semitic violence is less prevalent in Marseille than elsewhere in France is largely based on anecdotal evidence, but it is strong anecdotal evidence: Everyone in France accepts it as a given, and it can be confirmed by even a casual perusal of French newspapers over the past several years: Horrible things just don't seem to happen in Marseille as often as they do elsewhere.

2. The French philosopher and essayist Ernest Renan provided the definitive expression of this doctrine in his famous speech to the Sorbonne, "Qu'est-ce que la Nation?" in 1882.

3. Patrick Parodi, "Citizenship and Integration: Marseille, a Model of Integration?" in *History-Geography* (Marseille: Académie Aix-Marseille, 2002). [French]

4. It would be intellectually indefensible to propose this as a complete explanation for Muslim separatism in France. Islam obviously gives rise to both radical and moderate interpretations; in its moderate interpretations, the acceptance of secular state sovereignty is perfectly admissible—and the great majority of Muslims in France adhere to the moderate view. One question, then, is why the radical element has in recent years gained ground. The growing influence of Saudi Arabian Wahhabism surely plays a sinister role: Saudi Arabia now provides 80 percent of the funding for mosques and Islamic centers in France. Another reason, as Zvi Ammar pointed out, is the explosive proliferation of radicalizing Arab media, disseminated through French cable and satellite television providers. France's perennially high structural unemployment rate does not help matters; economically marginalized youths who see no prospect of advancement in French society will obviously find more to admire in radical separatism than those who view integration as a sure path to social advancement. Finally, most of France's previous immigrants came from Europe, and therefore from cultures more similar to France's own: It is simply easier to bridge the gap between, say, Polish culture and French culture than it is to bridge the gap between Algerian and French culture—if nothing else, consider the subjugated status of women in most Islamic countries, one that is rightly repellent to European sensibilities. Islam has always seen in Christian Europe a rival, not an analogue: It requires a much greater stretch for someone born and raised in the Islamic world to become French than it does for someone born and raised in Portugal.