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Sophie B. Roberts, *Citizenship and Antisemitism in French Colonial Algeria, 1870-1962*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 392 pp. List of figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$150.00 (hb). ISBN: 978-1-107-18815-0

Review by Samuel Kalman, St. Francis Xavier University.

In recent years, historians of the French Empire have displayed renewed scholarly interest in relations between European settlers and Algerians, the Arabs and Kabyles whose land was expropriated, their culture and religion rigidly monitored by the state, and who were forced to live under the *indigénat* legal code. Gallic authorities based this indignity and repression on the political fiction that the conquered were not citizens, but subjects, and thus ineligible for the rights and benefits enjoyed by the French and, subsequently, the “Europeans”—the Spanish, Italian, and Maltese inhabitants who received full recognition through an 1889 law. As a result of this schema, officials and populace often portrayed Algeria through the lens of a social binary—superior Europeans and inferior *indigènes*—consistently challenged by reformers and nationalists until the negotiation of an independent state in 1962, following the Algerian War of Independence.

Clearly such a rigid vision obfuscates the existence of blurred lines within the interstices of the imperial system, from the persistence of Muslim landowners to the success (and often citizenship) of the educated and politically active *évolués*. However, there is another complication: the status of the substantial Jewish community, granted citizenship through the Crémieux decree of 1870, which technically positioned Algerian Jews as equals to French and European denizens. Scholars have examined the growth and development of the community under colonial rule, variously emphasizing French attempts to “civilize”, assimilation and socio-economic success, and the tensions between traditional communities and values, and European ideals. Historians have also investigated the anti-Semitic backlash against both Jewish status and its benefits, campaigns that frequently resulted in physical harm and property destruction.[1] Given the breadth of existing scholarship, one might presume that little remains to be said about Algerian Jews. Yet in her monograph concerning the complex relationship between Jewish citizenship and anti-Semitism, Sophie Roberts reveals multiple new complexities and layers of the community’s struggles for political and social recognition.

First, Roberts examines Algerian Jewish life and anti-Semitism on the local level, adroitly noting that the battlegrounds were almost exclusively municipal, in which various blocs competed for political control and economic success. If native French settlers existed at the height of the colonial pyramid, the newly anointed citizens from Spain, Italy, and Malta (the *néos*) struggled to

gain recognition, their “status anxiety” invariably leading to hostility towards Jewish competitors from the moment the Crémieux decree became law. Hence in French colonial Algeria, anti-Semitism was never about religion, but rather unwanted competition—in government, business, and the streets. Moreover, Jewish citizenship infuriated Muslims, who viewed the decree as an insult given their second-class treatment, an incentive to intermittent violence against Jews, while bolstering reformist demands for equality. Yet in an ironic twist, the Jewish community took decades to accept French laws and customs like civil marriage, only fully embracing them during the interwar era. Thus Roberts rejects standard portraits of fixed identities, instead turning to Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper’s “categories of practice”, emphasizing the lived experiences of ordinary people, from citizenship to social class, and proclaiming that “Algerian identity was processual, fluctuating, and multiple, and evolved alongside the practice of and challenge to Algerian French citizenship” (p. 14).

The first chapter examines the beginnings of both Jewish citizenship and anti-Semitic campaigning. Rejecting the notion that the 1890s xenophobic surge in elections and neighbourhoods alike merely reflected settler separatism, Roberts argues that this agenda was twinned with a parallel desire for *néos* to be accepted as truly French. Most of the movement’s leaders were Spanish and Italian, facing economic recession and Gallic apathy, and the Ligue antifasciste juive, anti-Semitic newspapers like *Libre parole* and *Le Silhouette*, and municipal councilors responded to their concerns. Jews were variously accused of ritual murder, manipulating elections on orders from rabbis and the Rothschilds, and being barbarians unworthy of citizenship. As a result, officials removed Jewish voters from electoral lists, pillaging synagogues and beating Jews, often with Muslim assistance while officials and police refused to get involved. Attempts at self-defense only made matters worse. The stabbing of prominent politician Paul Irr in Mostaganem in May 1897 resulted in rioting and property destruction, which eventually spread to surrounding communities, with police idling until the alarmed Governor General intervened after four days as local Muslims became increasingly agitated. Naturally the prominent anti-Semitic press blamed Jews.

These campaigns culminated in the subject of the second chapter, the 1898 anti-Semitic electoral triumph that sent numerous deputies to the Paris Chamber and handed Max Régis, the doyen of Algerian anti-Semites, the mayoralty of Algiers, which metropolitan xenophobes perceived as a “testing ground” for their own campaigns during the Dreyfus era. In fact, Roberts insists that the affair cannot be understood without the colonial dimension, and the campaigns of the Italian born Régis and his belligerent *L’Antijuif* broadsheet. She traces his career from beginnings protesting the appointment of a Jewish law professor in 1897, through a leading role as provocateur and participant in 1898 riots in which shops and homes were decimated as hundreds participated in planned actions, led by municipal politicians buoyed by rumors of Jewish misdeeds, the desire to remove a foreign “disease”, and ongoing status anxiety over the economic and political position of the *néos* in Algerian society. This story is partially a familiar one, yet Roberts chooses to view the events through the prism of two fictional representations, *Cagayous Antijuif* (1898) and *Daniel Ulm: officier juif et patriote* (1911), providing a highly original treatment of perception and identity lacking in previous accounts. Although Régis’s appointment ended in exile and eventual disgrace, revealing the limits of official tolerance for disorder of any sort in the colonial setting, Roberts successfully argues that anti-Semitism became an established path for political success in Algeria.

In the following chapter, Roberts changes course, moving from anti-Semitism to assimilation, as Jews after 1910 became increasingly patriotic, attempting to demonstrate their Frenchness and fully exploring the benefits of citizenship, serving en masse in World War One. Groups like the Alliance israélite universelle in France and the local Comité algérien d'études sociales and its leader, the prominent surgeon Henri Aboulker, unceasingly reminded the public of Jewish sacrifice during wartime, publishing a *Livre d'or* in 1919 listing the names of the dead and the medals awarded to the living. Throughout the interwar era, Jews won election on dozens of Municipal Councils and the regional Conseil général, which resulted in renewed anti-Semitism, especially in Oran where Jules Molle and the Unions latines found political success by appealing to *néo* insecurity and xenophobia.

The fourth and fifth chapters discuss the crux of these campaigns--the 1934 Constantine pogrom and its aftermath. Although the subject has recently been discussed by historians like Joshua Cole, Roberts introduces new sources and provides a uniquely comprehensive historical treatment.[2] In an era of economic uncertainty and misery, conflicts between left and right, European and Jew, Muslim and non-Muslim, she proposes that the resulting violence can only be understood when examining local issues, "shifting political and social hierarchies as well as perceived threats to the status quo" (p. 144). Given Jewish business and political success in Constantine and the established hierarchy which placed Europeans and Jews above Muslims yet below French residents, stresses persisted on all sides. In an era of increasing Arab/Kabyle nationalism and French refusal to enact meaningful reforms, the number of violent incidents increased, particularly between Jews and Muslims, with Jews often the aggressors, betraying their own status anxiety. Naturally, Europeans took full advantage to encourage aggrieved Muslims to attack their Jewish "enemies".

Using newly discovered sources--Jewish organizational reports, administrative questionnaires--Roberts provides an excellent blow-by-blow account of the resulting August 1934 pogrom, while emphasizing that "the ways in which the different groups in the colony experienced, deconstructed, and interpreted the pogrom illuminate the meaning and limits of citizenship in the colony" (p. 171). She recognizes the role of rumor, that the violence was directly caused by the supposed desecration of a local mosque by a Jewish soldier, published in the European press and quickly spreading in Muslim quarters. The chapter also clearly highlights the abject refusal of anti-Semitic police and gendarmes to intervene, and official waffling for several days, that transformed an outburst of violence into a pogrom. Not only did the Governor General and local officials refuse to acknowledge Jewish victimization, many blamed Jews for the riots, while using rumour and supposition to construct wildly inaccurate accounts.

Although Muslim attacks against Jews persisted in towns like Sétif, the primary thrust of anti-Semitic activity returned to the *néo* camp. In chapter six, Roberts vividly details the 1937-38 campaign by Sidi-Bel-Abbès Mayor Lucien Bellat to remove Jews from electoral lists, a pre-emptive move against the Crémieux decree and the resulting opposition mounted by the Ligue internationale contre l'antisémitisme, Ligue des droits de l'homme, and Constantine prefectorial officials worried that the campaign could spread throughout Algeria, endangering both Jewish citizenship and public security. Although the matter was finally settled by Premier Albert Sarraut in a January 1939 decree stating that Jews no longer required documentary proof to exercise citizenship rights, Roberts deftly notes that the true legacy of the extreme Right's anti-Semitic campaigning during the 1930s only became apparent with the advent of the Vichy regime in

1940. In the sixth chapter, she posits the abrogation of the Crêmeiux decree and zealous application of the regime's anti-Semitic measures in Algeria as directly linked to prior precedents.

Both effectively erased decades of Republican work, as by 1940 Jews had become entirely French, leaving behind attachments to Algerian communities and habits, now educated in Gallic schools, and completely integrated into the European lifestyle and economy. Moreover, if, previously, anti-Semitism was municipal, now it became state policy, the culmination of efforts since the 1890s to marginalize the community. New anti-Semitic governors and prefects enacted the *Statut des juifs* and its Algerian corollary, abrogating the Crêmeiux decree, restricting Jewish education and employment, and aryanizing property and businesses. The anti-Semitic settler population rejoiced at these developments, while Muslims vacillated between satisfaction at the end of Jewish privilege and fears that their own ambitions would be effectively thwarted. Yet for Jews, a crisis of identity emerged. Many had abandoned Judaism for Catholicism and married non-Jewish spouses, and Roberts duly cites dozens of letters and petitions to Vichy officials from individuals, rabbis, and groups like the CAES, to restore voting rights, administrative positions, and civil rights.

Unlike the metropolitan community, Algerian Jews were spared further indignity due to the Allied arrival through Operation Torch in November 1942. Yet they remained wary of France in the post-1943 era, their identity profoundly shaken by the betrayal of Vichy and the popular support for anti-Semitic measures. More worrisome was the emergence of Algerian nationalism and eventually war, which left them with a stark choice: to remain under Muslim rule or emigrate to an alien territory which would never accept them as equals. The final chapter discusses this conundrum, from struggles throughout 1943 to have Vichy legislation reversed by General Giraud and Charles de Gaulle, bolstered by a global outpouring of support, to concerns about the growth of Algerian nationalism and its potential impact upon Jews. Although they initially sought to remain neutral in the ensuing war, it gradually became clear that despite mistreatment at the hands of France during the occupation, the possibility of emigration to Israel, and FLN assurances of equal treatment in an independent Algeria, they would necessarily accompany the settlers across the Mediterranean.

Given the book's comprehensive and original discussion of Jewish citizenship and its opponents, Roberts has provided an important contribution to the current historiography concerning colonial Algerian politics and society. The decision to utilize individual case studies and to privilege local conditions over studying Algeria writ large both contribute to a highly effective study. The sources are particularly impressive, including the use of archival material from a wide variety of French collections, and seldom referenced documents from the Alliance israélite universelle and the Centre de documentation juive contemporaine, supplemented by material from Israel and the United States. This is not to say that the work is entirely flawless. Discussions of interwar anti-Semitism and the extreme Right are highly selective, strangely leaving out the prolonged and leading efforts of Gabriel Lambert and the fascist leagues (the PPF, PSF, and RNAS). A thorough discussion of their substantial memberships and prioritization of xenophobia would certainly have bolstered the relevant chapters. In addition, although there is much discussion of essential links between colonial and metropolitan events/movements, along the lines of Gary Wilder's notion of the French Imperial nation-state, most chapters contain very little about the latter aside from a cross-Mediterranean discussion of the Dreyfus Affair and French political instability in the 1930s. Although this certainly does not diminish the book's conclusions about the colonial sphere, it does leave the reader wondering

about metropolitan responses and the role of French anti-Semitic movements in Algeria after the late nineteenth century. Finally, although the conclusions of the final chapter concerning post-Vichy Algerian Jewish ambivalence to France and the difficulties in deciding whether to remain or leave during the Algerian War are critical to the book's analytical framework, it tends to read as a compendium of previously published work concerning the May 1945 massacres, Algerian nationalism, and the conduct of the war. Perhaps it might have been shortened, forming an epilogue which emphasized the specifically Jewish framework of the post-1945 era. However, such quibbles should not diminish the clear accomplishment of this work. Roberts has at once successfully synthesized previous scholarship about Jews and anti-Semitism in Algeria, while providing keen analysis, critical theoretical observations, and excellent research throughout. It is eminently readable for students and scholars alike, and highly recommended.

## NOTES

[1] For recent works on Algerian Jews, see, for example: Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Sahara Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Joëlle Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory: A Jewish-Muslim Household in Colonial Algeria, 1937-1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Concerning anti-Semitism, see variously: Samuel Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism* (New York: Palgrave, 2013); Martin Thomas, ed., *The French Colonial Mind, Volume Two: Violence, Military Encounters, and Colonialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Jacques Cantier, *L'Algérie sous le régime de Vichy* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002); Geneviève Dermenjian, *La Crise anti-juive oranaise (1895-1905): l'antisémitisme dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986).

[2] Joshua Cole, "Anti-Semitism and the Colonial Situation in Interwar Colonial Algeria: The Anti-Jewish Riots in Constantine, August 1934", in Thomas, *French Colonial Mind*.

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