“A French Jew Emancipated the Blacks”

Discursive Strategies of French Jews in the Age of Transnational Emancipations

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ABSTRACT This article examines the rhetorical strategies put in place by French Jewish activists to demand equal civil and political rights for Jews in southeastern Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. It identifies the parallel they drew between the abolition of slavery and Jewish emancipation as a central plank in this campaign. Through references to the antislavery movement, French Jews sought to make Jewish emancipation a matter of international law and mobilize different constituencies at home and abroad. Drawing on the biblical story of the Exodus, this abolitionist rhetoric was an attempt to challenge the Christian nature of abolitionism and oppose exclusionary views of European society. The emergence of this new emancipatory discourse is analyzed within the national framework of France as well as in a broader eastern European and world context.

KEYWORDS Romania, slavery, abolitionism, Jewish emancipation, political language

How could Jews remain the Pariahs of the civilized world when the emancipation of Negroes was conquered at such a high cost?
—*Archives israélites*, 1868

This striking comparison between Romanian Jews—“the pariahs of the civilized world”—and Black slaves in the United States was the rhetorical climax of an appeal made by Adolphe Crémieux in 1868.[1] He penned it as president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle to remind the European Powers that Romania still denied the civil and political rights of its Jewish inhabitants. A prominent lawyer and Jewish leader in nineteenth-century France, Crémieux (1796–1880) was a crucial figure in contemporary French politics and became the first Jewish minister in Europe in 1848. His interest in antislavery developed after he met the Abbé Grégoire, who had campaigned for Jewish emancipation

1. *Archives israélites*, 1868, 469–74 (hereafter *AI*). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

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and the abolition of slavery during the Revolution.[2] Crémieux first voiced his opposition to slavery in his 1831 legal brochure analyzing the status of free people of color in the colonies.[3] A member of the young Société Française pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage, he led the defense in the trial of participants in a rebellion of free people of color and slaves in Martinique in 1833–34.[4] In 1840, while in London in the context of the Damascus affair, he spoke at the World Anti-slavery Convention.

Crémieux's abolitionist engagement shaped the emancipationist politics of the Alliance, which he led from 1863 until he died in 1880.[5] The first permanent international Jewish organization, the Alliance aimed to defend Jews around the world. In North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, this mainly meant providing modern secular education for local Jews.[6] In southeastern Europe, the organization did not seek to transform Jewish populations through education. Instead, its mission there was primarily a legal one targeting the successor states to the Ottoman Empire and aiming to make these states abrogate laws discriminating against Jews. The fight for the emancipation of Jews in the region, started by the Alliance immediately after its creation in 1860, turned out to be a protracted one. Bulgarian and Serbian Jews received equal civil and political rights as a result of the 1878 Berlin Congress.[7] Romania, however, did not abide by the treaty's stipulations. Instead, the vast majority of Jews there were classified as "aliens not subject to foreign protection" until after World War I, making them effectively stateless.

Adolphe Crémieux's analogy between Romanian Jews and Black slaves could seem disconcerting as well as isolated. It was, however, a cornerstone of the Alliance's campaign in southeastern Europe in the 1860s and 1870s and helped the organization articulate a Jewish emancipatory discourse beyond the national framework of France. French Jewish activists' political language was characteristic of the liberal struggles of the mid-nineteenth century, when the emancipation question was central. Striving to eliminate various forms of oppression and discrimination, reform-minded political and cultural actors created an age of transatlantic emancipations.[8] Although scholars have since lost sight of the interconnectedness of these fights, these reformers were very much aware of being part of a global movement, were frequently in contact, and shared

2. Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux*, 1:118.
3. Crémieux, *Colonies*.
4. Jennings, *French Anti-slavery*, 42, 52.
5. Except for 1867, when Salomon Munk was its president.
6. Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*.
7. It took a full decade, until 1888, for Serbia to implement this requirement of the treaty.
8. The expression *transatlantic emancipations* was coined by Elèna Mortara, *Writing for Justice*.

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a political language.[9] Reformers on both sides of the Atlantic, many of them Jewish, frequently deployed references to slavery and depictions of enslavement by despotic rulers. This revolutionary language was part of an established tradition for both Jews and Christians: the rhetoric of emerging from slavery, shaped by the biblical story of the Exodus, has deep roots in early modern political thought. It has continued to shape political language throughout the twentieth century.[10]

French Jews' invocations of past and present slavery brought together different forms of liberation from slavery—Egyptian bondage of the Hebrews, Black slavery in the Americas, serfdom in eastern Europe—to discuss the status of Jews in contemporary Europe.[11] This rhetoric enabled French Jewish activists to contest the Christian nature of abolitionism and, consequently, was part of a broader attempt to establish Jews and Judaism as modern. Abolitionist rhetoric mobilized a transnational, interreligious moral politics that would include Jews. In the post-1848 period it allowed the Alliance's leadership to place its advocacy on behalf of Jews in southeastern Europe on the same symbolic level as abolitionism or national independence movements.

The political speeches and writings of French Jewish campaigners reflected a broader transformation of religious identities during the long nineteenth century. Their conceptions of abolition—whether from a theological, political, or racial perspective—shifted from the early 1840s to the late 1880s. Invocations of slavery were increasingly entangled with attempts to enter the political field as part of religious internationalism.[12] By bringing together transatlantic and European histories of abolition with debates on colonies, the rule of international law, and lobbying to influence post-Ottoman state building, I argue that references to the abolitionist movement allowed Jewish diplomacy to frame the international regulation of Jewish emancipation in terms of previous interventions against slavery.

9. Mortara, *Writing for Justice*, xv. Several studies exploring the connections between various liberal causes of the nineteenth century have appeared since the publication of Mortara's book. Focusing on discourse, Holly Case also underlined historians' tendency to work in silos to introduce her study of questions as "an aggregate phenomenon with a history of its own" (*Age of Questions*, xiii–xiv). Enrico Dal Lago's work explores how major figures of the transatlantic abolitionist international embraced other progressive causes, such as democratic nationalism and the women's rights movement. He omits Jewish emancipation as one of the significant progressive causes of the mid-nineteenth century, however ("Antislavery and Nationalism").

10. Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution* gives examples from liberation theology in Latin America, the civil rights movement in the United States, and the Zionist movement.

11. On the role of Jewish historians in identity building, see Brenner, *Prophets of the Past*; Feiner, *Haskalah and History*; Schorsch, *From Text to Context*; and, on France, Simon-Nahum, *La cité investie*; and Chouraqui, Dorival, and Zytnicki, *Enjeux d'histoire, jeux de mémoire*. For other genres, see Skolnik, *Jewish Pasts, German Fictions*; Efron, *German Jewry*; Samuels, *Inventing the Israelite*; Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*; and Shandler, *Shtetl*.

12. For a comparative overview of how different communities of believers morphed into communities of opinion, see Green and Viaene, *Religious Internationals*.

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We Were Slaves in Egypt: Remembering and Transcending the Past

After gaining equal rights in 1790–91, French Jews established a link between the slavery of their ancestors—whether in Egypt or in the various forms of Old Regime bondage that they called "moral slavery"—and the chattel slavery of Blacks. They also drew parallels between the emancipation of oppressed Jewish masses and the national emancipation of peoples elsewhere in Europe.[13] By establishing such links between the Exodus and the revolutions of 1789 and 1848, they crafted a usable past.

Interpretations of Jewish history are inextricably linked with the historiography of Jewish politics.[14] Scholars of Jewish history have long debated what events constituted a watershed in the evolution of modern Jewish politics—the 1881–82 pogroms in the Russian Empire, the 1858 Mortara case, the wave of revolutions in Europe in 1848, or, going even farther back in time, the 1840 Damascus affair, when the local Jewish community faced a ritual murder accusation.[15] The first blood libel in the Muslim world, this event triggered a type of international action that was more public and visible than earlier Jewish intercession efforts.[16] It also led to the development of a popular Jewish press that offered a new means of leverage to international Jewish diplomacy.[17] Two decades later the abduction of the young Jewish boy Edgardo Mortara by the papal police in Bologna after his family's housekeeper had secretly baptized him mobilized European Jewish leaders, who ultimately failed to have the boy returned to his family.[18] This event highlighted the persistence of anti-Jewish prejudices in Europe while laying bare the weaknesses of Jewish politics of the time. It prompted the foundation of the Alliance, envisaged as a way to coordinate individual efforts and overcome the limits of ad hoc intercession.

If French Jews' own uneven experience of emancipation and integration into French society inspired the emergence of modern Jewish solidarity, advocacy on behalf of Jews in southeastern Europe also reflected a positive view of—and identification with—Europe. French Jews tried to promote their own vision of Europe and to shape the society they wanted to live in, in France and beyond. For Jews in western Europe, the issue of the legal status of coreligionists in southeastern Europe was crucial. While Serbian Jewry counted fewer than two thousand people, Romanian Jewry represented a sizable and rapidly growing

13. Philippe, "Les juifs et la IIème République," 108–9.

14. Biale, "Modern Jewish Ideologies."

15. Baron, "Impact of the Revolution of 1848"; Graetz, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*; Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*; Frankel, *Damascus Affair*; Lederhendler, *Road to Modern Jewish Politics*.

16. On Jewish intercession, see Guesnet, "Die Politik der 'Fürsprache.'"

17. Frankel, *Damascus Affair*.

18. Kertzer, *Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*; Green, *Moses Montefiore*, 258–81.

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community.[19] Having recently gained autonomy from the Ottoman Empire, Romania and Serbia were in the process of building their state institutions and defining citizenship.[20]

French Jewish activists went to great lengths to kindle the interest of the French public in the fate of Jews there. Their preoccupation with the fate of coreligionists in southeastern Europe did not echo similar concerns in international relations. When Edgar Quinet published an article advocating Romanian independence in the famous *Revue des deux mondes* at the end of the Crimean War (1853–56), he described Romanians as "a discovered nationality . . . lost at the end of Europe."[21] Although Napoléon III and the romantic nationalist elite of the Collège de France supported Romanian independence, relations between the two countries were not particularly important in the second half of the nineteenth century. Jewish emancipation was not on top of their agenda either: the 1856 Congress of Paris dealing with southeastern Europe had discussed only the status of Christians.

Given the need for analogies that would have a broad appeal, it is hardly surprising that Jews in nineteenth-century France turned to the story of the Exodus as the Hebrew Bible enjoined them to do.[22] Jewish public figures recalled the biblical episode in changing ways during the century, however. Taking the floor at the Assembly of Jewish Notables convened by Napoléon Bonaparte in 1806 to clarify the relationship between Jews and the French state, Berr Isaac Berr spoke of the impact of slavery on Jews across the world. Other speakers at the assembly also emphasized this shared experience of slavery, speaking like Berr of "our slavery." If some French Jews had not yet proved themselves "worthy of the inalienable rights of men, subjects, and citizens," the latter explained, this was because "traces of debasement and slavery have not yet entirely disappeared among all our coreligionists."[23]

Similarly, the German journalist of Jewish origin Ludwig Börne claimed in his letters about the July Revolution: "Yes, because I was born a slave, I love freedom more than you. Yes, because I have experienced slavery, I understand freedom better than you."[24] In 1839 the Saint-Simonian of Jewish origin Gustave

19. From 135,000 people in 1859, it grew to over 250,000 by the end of the century. Iancu, *Les juifs en Roumanie*, 135–44.

20. Van Meurs and Mungiu Pippidi, *Ottomans into Europeans*; Iordachi, *Liberalism, Constitutional Nationalism, and Minorities*.

21. Quinet, "Les Roumains," 375, quoted in Durandin, "Edgar Quinet et les Roumains," 164.

22. The importance of the biblical command to remember, and thus of memory to Judaism, derives from the fact that God revealed himself historically. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 9–12.

23. Tama, *Collection des actes*, 158, 160–61, 307.

24. Quoted in Baron, "Impact of the Revolution of 1848," 209. In a similar vein, rabbis involved in the civil rights movement emphasized the past experience of slavery to promote antiracist activism in the Jewish community in the 1960s. Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 45–75.

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d'Eichthal and Ismaÿl Urbain, a mixed-race man from Cayenne converted to Islam, cowrote the *Lettres sur la race noire et la race blanche*. This joint project was based on the commonality they saw in their respective situations: as d'Eichthal put it, "Urbain and I . . . , we are the Black and the Jew: the two outcasts, the two prophets."[25] This type of self-representation exemplified by the speakers at the Assembly of Notables, Börne, and d'Eichthal would evolve in subsequent decades as the last legal discriminations against French Jews were abolished and as the latter started promoting the emancipation of coreligionists abroad.

When Crémieux traveled to Cairo during the 1840 Damascus affair and met local Jews, he described them as "stagnating in the land of Egypt." Visiting the Ottoman province in an age of imperial expansion, Crémieux started to think about ways to "civilize" Jews in the East, for instance by opening western schools for Jews in Alexandria and Cairo.[26] In his circular asking German Jews to fund these schools, Crémieux employed an additional layer of symbolism. In his narrative, European Jews like himself were liberating Jews in the East, just as Moses had liberated Jews in Egypt from slavery. By civilizing eastern Jews, Crémieux concluded, the West would reimburse its debt to the East, the cradle of Judaism.[27] Past and present collided: Egypt had pride of place not only in Jewish memory but also in the French colonial imaginary after Napoléon's Egyptian campaign (1798–1801) and Jean-François Champollion's decipherment of the Rosetta stone hieroglyphs in 1822.[28] Broadly speaking, however, Hebrew captivity did not loom large in French Egyptomania. In western Europe and the United States, Egypt functioned as a symbol of ancient sovereignty, or as a source of "inspiration for a secular symbolic order designed to replace the church" in the immediate postrevolutionary period in France. The emergence of scientific Egyptology later in the century started dissociating the study of artifacts from concerns such as the confirmation of the biblical narrative.[29]

In the 1860s and 1870s, in his annual speeches at the General Assembly of the Alliance, Crémieux still evoked past bondage. He spoke of the family of Israel as "a gathering of ill-treated, despised, and trampled, slaves" when it went out of Egypt.[30] His primary aim, however, was no longer to establish continuity

25. D'Eichthal and Urbain, *Lettres sur la race noire et la race blanche*, 13, 20, 31. D'Eichthal's use of racial language constituted a self-defense strategy influenced by the French Romantic historians' view of the nation as composed of a plurality of races. Leff, "Self-Definition and Self-Defense."

26. Green, *Moses Montefiore*, 151–53.

27. Crémieux, *Aux Israélites de l'Allemagne*.

28. This was most palpable in the Saint-Simonian colonial fantasies regarding Egypt. Pilbeam, *Saint-Simonians*, 104–29.

29. Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 21, 178.

30. *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 1864, 18–20 (hereafter *BAIU*).

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between this past status and his present condition as a French Jew. The emphasis was no longer on "our slavery." The last vestiges of legal inequality affecting French Jews had been abolished in the first half of the century, while the Provisional Government of 1848 counted two Jewish members—Crémieux and Michel Goudchaux. They held, respectively, the portfolios of Justice and Finance. French Jews' enslavement was in the distant past now that they enjoyed equal citizenship and even political power.

The Exodus story helped Crémieux anchor the abolition of slavery throughout the French empire—pronounced by the 1848 government—in the Jewish past. Following the traditional pattern of interpretation of the biblical episode, where God acts through Moses, the Alliance's president emphasized that he had been a minister in the government that had abolished slavery. "A French Jew emancipated the Blacks, this Jew . . . asks you to do for the Jews of Romania what he did . . . for the Negroes of our colonies," Crémieux told Romanian deputies when he stopped in Bucharest in 1866 to give a speech in which he called for the emancipation of Romanian Jews. This stress on human agency was hardly surprising, given the role that he had already played in fighting discrimination affecting French Jews in the first half of the century.[31] When other French Jewish actors, such as Chief Rabbi Isidor or the activist Armand Lévy, later drew parallels between Jewish emancipation and the abolition of slavery in the campaign on behalf of Romanian Jews in the 1860s and 1870s, they were relying on a well-established pattern.[32]

French Jews contrasted earlier periods to the present when remembering past bondage. Their constant invocation of slavery relegated the Egyptian as well as the preemancipation period to a distant and almost mythical past, thereby highlighting their own progress. By positioning themselves at the forefront of European progress, they drew on a clear civilizational discourse. For them, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was the "basis of modern civilization." They saw the principles first established by the 1789 Revolution as having spread from France to the rest of Europe during the 1848 revolutions.[33] By constructing this linear narrative of civilizational progress and highlighting

31. *Le siècle*, Aug. 7, 1866. Through his efforts the French state started to pay rabbis' salaries in 1831, just as it had done for the clergy of the two other state-recognized religions—Catholicism and Protestantism—since the days of Napoléon I. In 1846 Crémieux obtained the abolition of the special oath that Jews were required to swear to testify in court. He also repeatedly denounced in the National Assembly the legal discriminations that French Jews faced abroad. Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux*, 1:45, 68, 76–87; 2:8–9.

32. Lévy, *L'occident et la persécution israélite*, 67–68; Lévy, *Lettre à M. Jean Bratiano*; *BAIU*, 1869, 43–44.

33. Armand Lévy, foreword to [Barasch,] *L'émancipation israélite*, 3–4.

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that they had been the first to be emancipated, French Jews sought to establish themselves as the natural defenders of Jewish rights on the international scene.[34]

If analogies between Jewish emancipation and abolitionism echoed the emancipatory message of the Springtime of the Peoples, they were also part of a longer counterdiscourse answering the Enlightenment's ambiguous views of Jews.[35] French Jewish evocations of their past as slaves proved that they had transformed their status: they had now become engaged in freeing others, whether Black slaves or other Jews. This drive to reverse the image was necessary because the emancipation of Jews in France had been conceived of as requiring subsequent regeneration. By taking up and modifying the analogy with Black slavery, French Jews proved that they were no longer the ones undergoing regeneration. Instead, they positioned themselves as active promoters of humanistic concerns while directing attention to other Jews and Black slaves and away from themselves.

French Jewish leaders' recurrent use of the parallel between the emancipation of Jews in southeastern Europe and the abolition of slavery echoed Grégoire's involvement in both Jewish emancipation and abolitionism. Although he had initially condemned those who were more concerned by "the blacks who lived two thousand leagues away" than by Jews living on French territory, Grégoire changed his mind after meeting representatives of free people of color.[36] The legal status of Jews in contemporary European society was not necessarily the primary concern of late eighteenth-century proponents of Jewish emancipation, such as Grégoire in France or Christian Wilhelm von Dohm in Prussia. Both Dohm and Grégoire's interests went beyond Jews and encompassed equal rights for all marginal social elements. For them, Jews represented a "test case" for the validity of their humanistic concerns: the improvement (*Verbesserung* or *régénération*) of Jews would also provide a proof for more general theoretical assumptions about human perfectibility.[37] French Jews appropriated Grégoire's twin fight while confronting this "test case" status ascribed to them.

When arguing for the emancipation of Jews in southeastern Europe, French Jews never placed these coreligionists on a par with themselves.[38] Persecutions

34. The understanding of civilization as a movement rather than a state was at the basis of modern European imperialism: it allowed the West to both identify itself with civilization and depict the latter as having a universal reach. Representations of France as the torch or pioneer of civilization within European nations were dominant until the 1870 defeat against Prussia. Bénéton, *Histoire de mots*, 35–51.

35. Focusing on European Jewish conceptions of others, Idelson-Shein's *Difference of a Different Kind* challenges the dominant image of Jews as passive objects of racialist thought in the eighteenth century.

36. Sepinwall, *Abbé Grégoire*, 91–92.

37. Volkov, "Exploring the Other," 161; Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 7–8.

38. Romanian politicians justified their opposition to Jewish emancipation by pointing to the alleged differences in western European and eastern European Jews' respective levels of civilization.

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and the lack of equal rights, French Jews assumed, resulted in the "degradation" or "debasement" of eastern European Jewry. "You made the Jews what they are," Crémieux told Romanian deputies in 1866. This view reflected French Jews' embrace of the concept of regeneration in the wake of their emancipation.[39] Regeneration, as conceived by the Abbé Grégoire, was both liberating and constraining for those it targeted. By pleading for the regeneration of particular groups and not only individuals, Grégoire demonstrated their humanity and demanded justice for them but also reinforced the idea that they were inferior to the rest of society.[40]

Crémieux did not place Romanian and western European Jews on an equal footing; instead, he stressed other reasons why they deserved emancipation, including their productiveness or engagement in honest trades. Such arguments had been deployed less than a century earlier in the debates about the emancipation of French Jews. The Alliance's president also opposed these supposed virtues of Romanian Jews to the Oriental laziness that, according to him, defined Romanians. In this respect, the separation between Romanian Jews and their surrounding society echoed French Jewish views of the relationship between Jews and Muslim society in colonial Algeria.[41] Thus the portrait French Jewish activists painted of Romanian Jews was an equivocal one: deserving emancipation, productive, already patriotic despite lacking political rights, yet not on the level of western European Jews due to the backwardness of the Romanian state and population.

French Jews conceived of their coreligionists' path toward emancipation as mirroring abolitionism. Crémieux's take on the abolition of slavery in his Bucharest speech was revealing, if self-contradictory: "Our great revolution of 1848 proclaimed the equality between whites and Blacks; it declared them brothers; it told them: 'God created you, we regenerate you,' and the Negroes of all the French colonies went from slavery to freedom."[42] While referring to equality and fraternity, the Alliance's president depicted Blacks not as fully equal but as passive beneficiaries of European generosity. In its official publications the Alliance similarly depicted the Jews it defended in Romania and elsewhere as powerless victims.[43] As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has shown in his work on the silencing of the Haitian Revolution in the production of history in the West, this lack of

39. Berkovitz, *Shaping of Jewish Identity*; Ozouf, "Regeneration." The adoption of French as the language of instruction in the Alliance's schools reflects the importance of French culture in the way regeneration was imagined.

40. Sepinwall, *Abbé Grégoire*, 195.

41. Bar-Chen, *Weder Asiaten noch Orientalen*, 131.

42. *Le siècle*, Aug. 7, 1866.

43. Leven, *Cinquante ans d'histoire*, 112–46; Lœb, *La situation des israélites*, 139–96; *Réunion en faveur des israélites de l'Orient*, 18–43.

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conceptual tools to grasp the role of actual slaves and their resistance to slavery characterized Enlightenment philosophers and French revolutionaries.[44] Crémieux's ambivalence regarding the agency of Black slaves or Romanian Jews echoed ambiguities already present in the Enlightenment: eighteenth-century philosophers could not escape the contradictions between discourse and practice, between their idea of human beings—thought to be equally human—and the realities of colonial practice.[45]

French Jewish activists did not aim to understand slaves' agency when invoking past or present slavery. Instead, the idea of slavery helped them produce a narrative in which they had transcended this past. Referring to the era when Jews were enslaved and presenting their fight for the emancipation of coreligionists as part of the broader movement to abolish slavery were two sides of the same coin. Crafting a usable past formed the pendant of creating a self-image as spearheading progress in the Jewish world.

Contesting the Christian Nature of Abolitionism

French Jews repeatedly asserted that European values were not exclusively Christian but also Jewish. In his tribute at Grégoire's graveside in 1831, Crémieux addressed the deceased in the following terms: "Can you hear me, O priest of Jesus Christ? Jews throughout the universe will mourn your passing."[46] Grégoire had been a rare and indispensable ally during revolutionary times. The universal human family he sought to build was, however, problematic for his Jewish contemporaries as it was conceived in mainly Christian terms. The humanistic concerns of men like Grégoire or Dohm had religious inflections: for them, Jews represented a test case for the strength of their Christian compassion.[47] In national terms, this meant that Grégoire did not object to Napoléon's renegotiation of the terms of Jewish emancipation in 1806–7. The convening of the Assembly of Notables indeed represented an implementation of Grégoire's conditionalist discourse, which called for the emancipation of Jews while insisting on their need to undergo a process of correction. Moreover, Grégoire hoped that regeneration would ultimately result in voluntary conversion to Catholicism. Beyond the borders of France, he envisaged that Europeans and other peoples would eventually reach universal fraternity, but these

44. Sepinwall offers a concrete example of this dynamic in her analysis of the Abbé Grégoire's relationship with Haitians (*Abbé Grégoire*, 195).

45. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 70–107.

46. Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux*, 1:119.

47. Volkov, "Exploring the Other," 161.

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other peoples would have to abandon their cultures and adopt European Christian values to be part of regenerated humankind.[48]

French Jewish campaigners on the international stage repeatedly challenged such a view of the world and its inhabitants. Speaking at the 1840 World Anti-slavery Convention in Exeter Hall, Adolphe Crémieux defiantly proclaimed in front of an audience of over 150 abolitionists, mainly from Great Britain and the United States, and Christian for the vast majority:

> I feel great pleasure in joining this Convention, because I am a descendant of those Hebrews who were the first to proclaim the abolition of slavery; and I this day only repeat what the Jews have always admitted in principle. Indeed, . . . it was the sect of the Essene which first declared slavery to be a crime. . . . In this assembly this must entitle them to the highest glory; and, I may add, that Jesus Christ himself, considered as a great legislator and moralist, has derived the principles of Christian charity from the mild and pure rules of the sect of the Essenes.

Asserting that Crémieux's statement constituted a direct attack on Christianity and the Christian values defended by the abolitionist meeting, the editors of the convention's proceedings insisted that such views did not represent the general opinion of the conference.[49]

As the outraged reaction to the depiction of abolitionism as a Jewish principle suggested, there was a strong Christian presence in the abolitionist movement. The first antislavery association in postrevolutionary France, founded in 1821, was tellingly called the Société de la Morale Chrétienne. Almost exclusively composed of Protestant members, this association was replaced by the Société Française pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage in 1834. Crémieux was one of the few—possibly the only—non-Christian members.

More important than the number of Christians in the membership of antislavery associations was the extent to which Christianity influenced the abolitionist movement as a whole. For non-Christians, the movement did not come across as particularly inclusive. Nineteenth-century French Jewish activists perceived it as dominated by Christianity both in terms of membership and in its orientation and values. The prospectus of the Société Française pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage denounced slavery as a "violation of Christian charity."[50] Seen in this context, Crémieux's claim that the Hebrews had abolished slavery first was an affirmation of Jews' ongoing role in the abolitionist movement. Just as they were defending a more secular view of Europe through their promotion

48. Sepinwall, *Abbé Grégoire*, 68–73, 194–97.
49. *Proceedings of the General Anti-slavery Convention*, 167–68.
50. Jennings, *French Anti-slavery*, 8–10, 19, 53.

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of Jewish emancipation in southeastern Europe, French Jews also asserted that the antislavery movement should reflect such a vision.

By the second half of the century, the question of slavery in ancient Judaism would become a recurrent topic of research and debate. Many apologetic dissertations used the vocabulary of the abolitionist movement to argue either that ancient Hebrews limited their ownership of slaves or that they treated them more humanely than their non-Jewish contemporaries.[51] In the late 1850s and early 1860s reform rabbis from Germany, such as Gustav Gottheil in Manchester or, more famously, David Einhorn in the United States, gave sermons or engaged in public polemics to demonstrate that slavery was contrary to Jewish values.[52] In his speeches at the Alliance's annual general assembly, Crémieux repeatedly stressed that the three main principles of Judaism were "nationality, the abolition of slavery, and the oneness of God."[53] At the same time, he never failed to remind his audience that these very principles were, in fact, the guiding principles of the nineteenth century.

The characterization of abolitionism as a Jewish principle points to a development that went far beyond mere inspiration from the abolitionist movement. In his study of patterns of Jewish self-representation in France during the Napoleonic period, Ronald Schechter challenged commonly accepted notions regarding the relationship between a minority group and its surrounding society to redefine paths of Jewish integration in France. He questioned the extent to which concepts such as assimilation, resistance, or hybridity can accurately explain the strategies of French Jews. Instead, Schechter contends that they integrated into the fabric of French society and culture by "appropriating the dominant culture through a combination of sacralization and other familiarizing techniques and representing the dominant culture as originally or essentially Jewish. . . . Rather than being assimilated into France, French Jews assimilated France into themselves."[54] This process presents striking similarities with paths of integration in the post-Napoleonic period.

While Schechter restricts his analysis to the national framework, the process of appropriation through sacralization and familiarization he describes also

51. Mielziner, *Die Verhältnisse der Sklaven*; Kahn, *L'esclavage selon la Bible et le Talmud*; Winter, *Die Stellung der Sklaven*. On this trend, see Gibson, *Jewish Manumission Inscriptions*, 56–95; and Bartchy, *First-Century Slavery*, 32.

52. Gottheil, *Moses versus Slavery*. See also Friedman, *Jews and the American Slave Trade*, 212.

53. *BAIU*, 1863, 1864, 1875, 1878. The first time Crémieux depicted the abolition of slavery as a core principle of Judaism coincided with Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. In the case of the Alliance, the invocation of nationality constituted a way for a minority fight to gain visibility and did not translate into concrete national aspirations. The organization's ultimate goal remained the achievement of equal rights for Jews and their integration in the countries where they lived.

54. Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 12–13.

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functioned beyond the borders of French society, at least in later periods. Crémieux went beyond the idea of a Jewish contribution to modern European civilization. Switching in an ahistorical way from one period to the other, the Alliance's president made the three "core" principles of Judaism appear timeless. By equating these principles with the ethos of the nineteenth century, he posited that Judaism itself was modern, even the paragon of modernity. This rhetoric allowed Crémieux to fend off demands for modernization and regeneration directed at the Jewish minority in France—and in Europe more generally. Judaism did not need to change to find its place in a modern Europe characterized by monotheism (regardless of whether it was Jewish or Christian), national movements (which Crémieux supported and saw as the emancipation of enslaved peoples), and its drive to abolish slavery. Judaism already incarnated those very values.[55]

If French Jews met with demands from French society to assimilate, they were also confronted with broader exclusionary claims, depicted as outsiders to European civilization. The abolitionist rhetoric deployed by French Jewish actors points to a broader framework of integration. Abolitionism and the support for national independence were not strictly French causes but European moral struggles. In the first half of the century, Jewish activists in Britain had similarly navigated humanitarian politics that had a distinct abolitionist dimension.[56] Slavery and nationality were not strictly national issues. A standard practice among pamphleteers from the 1830s onward was to underscore the importance of a given question by linking it to the broader European order or emphasizing that it could be solved only at the European level.[57] Even in France and in spite of emancipation in 1790–91, debates about the status of Jews persisted. In a controversy that lasted from the 1840s to the 1860s, Ernest Renan, who believed that Jewish culture was inferior to contemporary European culture and that people of Semitic origin were a priori corrupt and incapable of improvement, confronted Jewish scholars such as Joseph Salvador and Salomon Munk.[58] The first work proclaiming the superiority of the white race in a systematic way appeared in France in the 1850s.[59]

55. Another way to establish Jews and Judaism as modern was to depict Catholicism as backward or medieval. In this respect, anticlericalism constituted an essential element of modern Jewish politics. Joskowicz, *Modernity of Others*.

56. The antislavery movement was even more central to the British national self-image and to the crystallization of Protestant internationalism. Clark and Ledger-Lomas, "Protestant International." On the ties between the Jewish cause and antislavery in the British Empire, see Green, "British Empire and the Jews," 188–90.

57. Case, *Age of Questions*, 50, 104, 140.

58. Graetz, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*, 214–24; Bar-Chen, *Weder Asiaten noch Orientalen*, 13–15. On the popular reception of *La vie de Jésus*, see Priest, *Gospel according to Renan*.

59. Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*.

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Crémieux's assertion that Judaism incarnated the main principles of the nineteenth century inscribed itself in a broader debate about the nature and character of Jewish law and its relationship to contemporary legislation in European states.[60] Discourses essentializing Judaism and contemporary Jewry as non-European contained many layers, one of which was the criticism of Jewish law. German Protestant theologians and Orientalists, such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, and Johann David Michaelis, leading the new field of historical biblical criticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, aimed to "salvage Christianity for the modern world." To do so, they strived to demonstrate that Christianity had transcended its origins: they depicted Christianity as having superseded Judaism both temporally, by constructing Judaism as an antiquated religion, and geographically, by casting it as an Oriental legal system.[61] For these scholars, disconnecting Christianity from Judaism meant dissociating European modernity from its supposedly Oriental heritage. Michaelis, in particular, focused on Jewish law—which he described as "Asian"—to oppose Jewish emancipation.[62]

Presenting emancipation as a universal and timeless Jewish principle was not the preserve of French Jewish campaigners alone. Nineteenth-century German Jewish liberals also interpreted and idealized the modern age as "the fulfillment of specific Jewish principles and promises." In an 1865 article about the victory of the northern states in the American Civil War, Ludwig Philippson, the editor of the leading German-language Jewish newspaper the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, made observations that were almost identical to French Jewish discursive practices of the time. For him, the end of serfdom in the Russian Empire and the abolition of slavery in the United States were the most important events of the nineteenth century. They represented a "victory of the Mosaic over the gentile principle."[63]

This type of argumentation echoed constructions of the past in nineteenth-century Jewish history writing.[64] The dominant narrative among these thinkers was that Jews gave birth to civilization—Western civilization—rather than simply contribute to it.[65] Through their participation in the theological debates of

60. Salvador had argued earlier in the century that Jewish law did not need to change to meet the demands of the modern French state. Berkovitz, *Shaping of Jewish Identity*, 146. See also Lerner, "Joseph Salvador's Jerusalem Lost and Jerusalem Regained."

61. Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity*, 12.

62. Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity*, 51–90.

63. Hoffmann, "Historicizing Emancipation," 332.

64. Research on the origins of Islam allowed Jewish Orientalists to develop a discourse stressing the equal, if not superior, value of Islam, as well as of Judaism vis-à-vis Christianity. In particular, studies on the rationality of Islamic law and ethics enabled Jewish Orientalists to defend Judaism's legal system. Heschel, "German Jewish Scholarship on Islam."

65. Heschel, "Judaism, Islam, and Hellenism," 98.

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the time, nineteenth-century German Jewish historians challenged hegemonic Christian scholarship and its vision of European history, thereby defending Judaism and its place in contemporary Europe. Scholars have recently interpreted these histories as early examples of postcolonial writing.[66]

While the primary function of French Jews' political language was to challenge the discourse of a superior European Christian modernity, it also reflected some more deep-seated anxieties. Although Jewish emancipation progressed across Europe, Jews continued to be perceived as "ambiguous whites," whose rights remained fragile.[67] Dehumanizing rhetoric peaked in the wake of colonial expansion, with racial thinking essentializing characteristics that had previously appeared mutable.[68] French Jewish activists never publicly evoked the connection between colonialism and antisemitism, but in his Bucharest speech, Crémieux condemned societies that did not see Blacks as humans. Between the lines, he criticized societies that still did not see their Jewish minority as human.[69]

A few years later, in 1870, Jews in Algeria received French citizenship collectively in the context of a broader reorganization of the colony, with a civilian administration replacing the military one.[70] As minister of justice in the Government of National Defense, Crémieux was in charge of drafting the decrees extending metropolitan laws to the colony. The decree enfranchising Algerian Jews, which came to bear his name, soon faced opposition. European settlers created the first anti-Jewish league in the colony, while Charles du Bouzet, in charge of the colony until the appointment of a civil governor, petitioned the French parliament to demand the abrogation of the decree. For du Bouzet, indigenous Jews were foreign to Western civilization and therefore could not become Frenchmen.[71] In the metropole, the minister of the interior submitted a draft bill echoing these concerns and demands to the parliament.[72]

Alarmed by this racialized understanding of French citizenship, French Jewish institutions and periodicals rallied around the defense of the Crémieux

66. Heschel, *Abraham Geiger*.

67. The expression is from Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 76. Julie Kalman highlights the persistence of anti-Jewish prejudices across the political spectrum in France in the first half of the nineteenth century (*Rethinking Antisemitism*).

68. On the meeting of Jews and Africans in the German imagination, see Davis, *Colonialism, Antisemitism*, 77–132. Gilman provides an overview of the mid-nineteenth-century racial scientific theories claiming to prove the Blackness of Jews (*Jew's Body*, 99–100, 171–75).

69. *Le siècle*, Aug. 7, 1866.

70. This measure would not be extended to Mzabi Jews in southern Algeria. Stein, *Saharan Jews*. The native Muslim population of Algeria remained colonial subjects.

71. Assan, *Les consistoires israélites*, 338–48.

72. *Journal officiel*, Aug. 13, 1871.

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Decree.[73] It survived, although with a restrictive amendment excluding immigrants from neighboring Tunisia and Morocco from naturalization. Criticism of the decree continued in the following decades.[74] When answering opponents of his decree, Crémieux resorted to the same description of Black slaves he had used five years earlier in his Bucharest speech, this time to characterize Jews in Algeria. In doing so, he confronted dehumanizing rhetoric targeting Jews much more directly.[75]

References to slavery initially contested the Christian nature of abolitionism and thereby carved a place for Jews and Judaism in contemporary European society. Increasingly, however, Crémieux found himself tackling racialized understanding of citizenship when defending the rights of Jewish populations in regions where the boundaries of Europe and the nature of European identity were debated. This was the case in Romania, as well as in Algeria, where the place of indigenous Jews in colonial society provoked intense discussion. While Christian European settlers were incorporated into the body of French citizens, the acceptance of indigenous Jews into this group remained fragile, even after 1870.[76]

Abolitionist rhetoric was detached from reality insofar as it was not about actual slaves, yet it remained central to western European Jewish politics. This paradox highlights how discussions over universalism and its limits, which were ignited and fueled by European imperialism, impacted directly on Jews in Europe. Such debates indeed reinforced the ambiguity of their political status and place in imperial societies—"between equal citizens and oppressed subjects," at times "both orientalist and orientalized."[77] That French and German Jewish actors used similar rhetoric despite their countries' different relations to slavery and colonialism underscores how these debates shaped Jewish political thought across national borders in Europe. Western European countries imagined themselves as simultaneously national, imperial, and European powers in this period, forcing Jews to negotiate their place in these three overlapping contexts.

Abolitionist Rhetoric as a Legal and Political Tool

If invocations of slavery had essential functions for French Jews' self-representation, they were also an important political strategy for the French Jewish leadership. After Crémieux's 1840 speech at the World Anti-slavery Convention, the

73. New Jewish organizations elsewhere in Europe, such as the Anglo-Jewish Association, also threw their weight behind the defense of the decree. *AI*, 1872, 548–49.

74. Blévis, "En marge du décret Crémieux."

75. Crémieux, *Réfutation*, 18–19.

76. On Algeria as a site where the notion of Europe was used to set a boundary to Republican universalism, see Tal, "Ethnic Republic."

77. Katz, Leff, and Mandel, *Colonialism and the Jews*, 11.

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French Jewish press followed his lead and started presenting antislavery as the single most influential form of political mobilization. In 1844, in its very first issue, *L'univers israélite* directly echoed this speech while anticipating by over fifteen years the founding manifesto of the Alliance. The new French Jewish periodical intended "to present to the world, *and especially to these countries where intolerance allows the abolition of slavery but not the emancipation of Jewish citizens*, the example of the positive results of equality before the law, which has made our country take the lead among the nations."[78] Two years later, in 1846, Olry Terquem, a radical reformer calling for a more liberal Judaism in France, suggested the creation of a Société Israélite d'Emancipation Universelle et de Civilisation Algérienne. Alphonse Cerfberr, a former member of the Consistoire Central, praised the initiative and suggested that the society's steering committee should be composed of people "chosen among the patriarchs of liberalism, professing different religions, but united like the abolitionists of slavery, under the banner of reform and progress."[79]

French Jews attempted to emulate the tactics of the antislavery movement as a way to broaden involvement in Jewish politics. As Cerfberr made clear, by employing this movement's tactics, they could hope to form alliances across political and religious lines. Terquem and Cerfberr were among many French Jews to call for the creation of an organization defending Jewish rights on the international scene in the 1840s and 1850s. These appeals often highlighted the new means of action the future organization would use in its freelance diplomacy.[80] The new Jewish discourse of advocacy that emerged in these years had a strong transnational dimension. British antislavery, which had already scored a significant success with the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, had a greater impact on French Jewish campaigners than the French abolitionist movement. The Société Française pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage never achieved the mass appeal of its British counterpart. For most of its history between the 1789 and 1848 revolutions, French antislavery remained an elite movement that limited itself to legislative initiatives and governmental channels, thus failing to mobilize public sentiment, especially in the provinces.[81] Consequently, it did not become part of a "vanguard of a new mode of collective action" embedded nationally in a broader reformist milieu, nor did it form an essential element of French foreign policy.[82] Most of the limited achievements of French antislavery in that period were, in fact, the result of British pressure.

78. *L'univers israélite*, 1844, 4–5. My emphasis.

79. *AI*, 1846, 181–83.

80. *AI*, 1858, 692–702.

81. Jennings, *French Anti-slavery*; Drescher, "British Way, French Way."

82. Drescher, *Pathways from Slavery*, 112, 132. On the nexus between antislavery and other reforms, see Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, 104–59.

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As a member of the Société Française pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage and participant at the World Anti-slavery Convention in London, Adolphe Crémieux must have been aware of these national differences. Like the British anti-slavery movement, the campaign for the emancipation of Jews in southeastern Europe in the 1860s and 1870s departed from conventional parliamentary and electoral politics and used innovative tactics of public action. Jewish activists heavily relied on the press—both Jewish and non-Jewish—for leverage, using it to appeal to public opinion and to publicize their parliamentary interpellations and public meetings.[83] Their admiration for British social movements was still palpable in the 1870s. When the Alliance and the Anglo-Jewish Association discussed where the 1876 meeting of European and American Jews in favor of their Oriental coreligionists should take place, the Alliance insisted on London since the city was "used to meetings, knew how to increase their visibility, and had the most widespread and influential newspapers."[84]

Events and ideas originating in colonial North Africa also influenced French Jewish politics in Europe. The Algerian example offered French Jews a precedent they could use to lobby the French government, this time outside the colonial context. Two reforms carried out by the Second Republic government proved essential for French Jewish international politics: the proclamation of Algerian territory as French territory by the Constitution of 1848 and, more crucially, the already mentioned abolition of slavery throughout the French empire in the same year.

In the spring of 1854 the main representative body of French Jewry, the Consistoire Central des Israélites de France, tried to intervene in favor of Ottoman Jews in the context of the Crimean War.[85] In their letter to Napoléon III, the Consistoire leaders proudly noted that French armies had made Algerian Jews, whom "a savage and century-long fanaticism had turned into pariahs and slaves," "free and loyal citizens." This was an exaggeration from the legal point of view as Jews in this colony would not become French citizens until 1870. It nevertheless reflected the Consistoire's view that French colonization had started civilizing Jews in Algeria from a legal perspective, by liberating them from dhimmi

83. I am here indebted to Craig Calhoun's argument ("'New Social Movements'") that early nineteenth-century movements such as abolitionism and temperance shared major distinguishing characteristics with the so-called new social movements of the 1960s, such as feminism and the peace and ecology movements. At the launch of Amnesty International in 1961, Peter Benenson similarly quoted antislavery as a precedent that had achieved its goal by relying on the pressure exercised by public opinion on governments. Loeffler, *Rooted Cosmopolitans*, 217–19.

84. For practical reasons, the meeting took place in Paris in the end. Paris, Archives de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle (hereafter AAIU), Registre du Secrétariat 41, Comité Central de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle (hereafter CCAIU) to Löwy, Anglo-Jewish Association, London (Nov. 24, 1876).

85. This petition was ignored by the French state. Green, "British Empire and the Jews," 197.

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status.[86] Pointing to this previous intervention in a Muslim land, the Consistoire leaders asked Napoléon III during the Crimean War to intervene in favor of Jews living in the Ottoman Empire.[87]

The aim was a legal one: to make the respect of religious freedom a question of international law. French Jewish activists described the lack of civil and political rights of Jews in Romania as slavery in a period when international law was expanding as a scholarly discipline. Antislavery victories offered a legal precedent. In an 1857 article published in the periodical *Archives israélites*, the editor, Samuel Cahen, pointed out that freedoms of conscience and worship were now both generally seen as legitimate yet still had to be put in practice. The states that had already proclaimed them should now ensure their implementation:

> Why would they not strive to make [religious liberty] fall within the truths that are indisputable, but whose acceptance or rejection distinguishes barbarism from civilization? Why . . . not stipulate that, from now on, the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of one's heart, . . . would be an integral part of *ius gentium* [*droit des gens*]? Have some fundamental principles not been made unchallengeable and accepted as common and obligatory law by mutual agreement in this way? How, for instance, has the slave trade been assimilated to piracy? By a concerted resolution of the Powers.[88]

This development was not surprising. Abolitionism shaped the development of humanitarian interventionism: the Declaration on the Universal Abolition of the Slave Trade pronounced by the 1815 Congress of Vienna constituted an essential precedent in the history of such intervention.[89] It not only helped establish an international humanitarian norm but also put in place an enforcement apparatus—a development referred to directly by the *Archives israélites*.

By placing Jewish emancipation on the same level as the abolitionist principle, French Jews framed it as another yardstick to measure a given state's level of civilization and therefore its standing in international society. While the Congress of Vienna only dealt with the slave trade, slavery itself became the target of international law later in the century. The international law expert Johann Kaspar Bluntschli tackled the issue his 1868 book *Das moderne Völkerrecht der civilisirten Staten*. For him, slavery, religious oppression, the suppression of independent peoples, or the breakup of constitutional order constituted severe

86. On the civilizing mission among Jews in Algeria and its reception, see Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*.

87. *AI*, 1854, 228–30; Feldman, "Question of Jewish Emancipation."

88. *AI*, 1857, 693–701.

89. Klose, "Enforcing Abolition."

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violations of international law justifying forcible intervention.[90] He envisaged intervention as coercive diplomacy, which, in theory, any state could resort to. In practice, only intercession by one or several European Great Powers could ensure the respect of international law and human rights.[91]

The French Jewish leadership sought to capitalize on the 1848 abolition of slavery. As noted, Crémieux was no stranger to the French antislavery movement. Nevertheless, he was not a prominent abolitionist like François-André Isambert or Adolphe Gatine. Likewise, Victor Schœlcher would play a more crucial role in bringing about the decree emancipating the roughly 250,000 slaves of the French colonies in 1848. Crémieux nonetheless frequently stressed that he had been a member of the provisional government of that year. Most important, he did so in the already cited speech he delivered in Bucharest in 1866, when he stressed the sacred aspect of justice:

> There is on this earth a power that God puts in the hands of man . . . : this power, it is justice! Human justice, divine attribute emanating from God for the protection of society. The minister of justice is, as it were, a minister from above. This ministry of greatness and holiness, this Ministry of Justice, a Jew received it from the provisional government he was part of; this Jew, he is in front of you![92]

He then continued to stress the centrality of the emancipation principle in the process of civilization, firmly locating Jewish emancipation within the transatlantic liberal crusades of the time:

> Gentlemen, turn your eyes to a great event that took place yesterday. Among men, there is a race that is debased and degenerate, that a stupefying slavery has degraded. . . . I want to speak about Negroes. They belonged to some insignificant category; we turned them into abject slaves. . . . Pardon me, Gentlemen, Negroes were men like you, like us. . . . We finally gave them civil and political emancipation! . . . Negroes became free in the United States, and now they enjoy complete rights. And yet you refuse to give the Jews what the Negroes have obtained![93]

Crémieux thus emphasized the seemingly unstoppable nature of this process by referring to two new stages in the history of abolitionism: the French abolition in 1848 and the recent Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Lincoln

90. Koskenniemi, *Gentle Civilizer of Nations*, 95. Bluntschli's study was translated into French in 1870.

91. Bluntschli, *Das moderne Völkerrecht*, 264–65.

92. *Le siècle*, Aug. 7, 1866.

93. *Le siècle*, July 28 and Aug. 7, 1866.

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in 1863. Comparing the emancipation of Jews in Romania to that of Black slaves allowed him to draw on the moral capital of the abolitionist movement.

The political clout he had gained through his involvement in the 1848 revolutionary government, which many in his audience admired, gave legitimacy to the Alliance's campaign on behalf of Romanian Jews. It also helped him make up for his lack of official position and overcome the limits of freelance diplomacy, especially when speaking in front of elected parliamentarians. Through the claim that he had himself abolished slavery, Crémieux embodied not only the provisional government but also the above-mentioned transformation, from ancient Hebrews as slaves in Egypt to modern Jews freeing others.

With this analogy between Black slaves and Romanian Jews, Crémieux was addressing the European public sphere as much as Romanian deputies. The abolition of Black slavery was undoubtedly not the most pressing concern in the arena of Romanian internal politics, and Crémieux chose the analogy to resonate with western European governments as much as with the Romanian one.[94] The Alliance's president ensured that his speech would have an impact in France by citing it extensively in a letter to *Le siècle*, one of the leading French liberal newspapers of the time.

Crémieux belonged to a generation of French political actors that had thought that the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of peoples went together. Movements for national liberation across Europe had marked his early political engagements. When expressing his revolutionary enthusiasm for the 1830–31 November Uprising, he used similar dichotomies between oppression, servitude, or slavery, on the one hand, and freedom, on the other, to describe the Polish fight for national independence.[95] In his 1836 magnum opus the *Code des codes*, Crémieux used the term *slavery* to refer to the state of a persecuted or oppressed nation, defining the sovereignty of the people as "the whole nation awaking and trampling its oppressors and tyrants after long centuries of enslavement."[96]

In the name of fraternity among peoples, the French *quarante-huitards* who had abolished slavery also viewed movements for national emancipation elsewhere in Europe with sympathy.[97] Descriptions of nations fighting for their independence as enslaved were ubiquitous in the years leading up to the Spring

94. Although abolitionism was crucial in the Romanian national context due to debates regarding the emancipation of "Gypsy" slaves, Crémieux did not seem to have been aware of the issue. Other activists more familiar with Romania, such as Armand Lévy, would later draw parallels between the fate of Romanian Jews and Gypsy slavery.

95. Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux*, 1:117; Comité central français en faveur des Polonais, "Manifeste."

96. Crémieux and Balson, *Code des codes*, 128.

97. This sympathy did not translate into actual support due to the cautionary foreign policy of the Second Republic. Agulhon, *Les Quarante-huitards*, 102–14.

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of Nations and its aftermath.[98] As noted, this rhetoric had deeper roots. The idea of deliverance from oppression became important in Western political history in the early modern period, with the biblical story of the Exodus providing a way for radicals to understand their own political activity.[99] National poets across Europe used this trope, from Adam Mickiewicz in his 1832 "Pilgrim's Litany," asking God to deliver Poland "from the slavery of Moscow, Austria, and Prussia," to Sándor Petőfi in his 1848 "National Song" in Habsburg Hungary. The aim was always the same: to rally support for the cause of national liberation.[100]

References to Jews—whether in contemporary Europe or the ancient world—formed part of this rhetoric. Heinrich Heine concluded in 1828 that the great question of the age was that of emancipation, "not simply . . . of the Irish, Greeks, Frankfurt Jews, West Indian negroes, and other oppressed races, but the emancipation of the whole world, and especially that of Europe."[101] Giuseppe Verdi's 1842 opera *Nabucco* used the example of Jewish captivity in Babylon as a foil for contemporary events, with its chorus of Hebrew slaves, "Va' pensiero," becoming a quasi-official anthem for the Risorgimento.[102] In Romania both Jews and non-Jews blamed the supposed backwardness of the Romanians—Jews and Christians alike—on the country's long "enslavement" under Ottoman rule. For the Romanian *quarante-huitard* Constantin Rosetti, this shared experience could in theory, if not in practice, form the basis of Romanian-Jewish fraternity.[103] After the failure of the 1848 revolutions, republican Masonic lodges kept alive this specific rhetoric of national liberation and solidarity among various national struggles.[104] Unsurprisingly, masonry was also a sphere in which Crémieux was particularly active, becoming Grand Master of the Scottish Rite in 1869.

The contemporary nationalist rhetoric of resistance against foreign domination, providing an additional framework in which French Jews could inscribe the fight for Jewish emancipation, mobilized different constituencies both in France and in southeastern Europe. By describing Romanian Jews as modern slaves, the Alliance's president placed their emancipation on the same symbolic level as the struggle for independence of "enslaved" nations and therefore dared hope to win over Romanian politicians. This analogy could only be well received in a country that was not yet de jure independent. With the legal

98. Dal Lago has shown how the struggles against slavery and national oppression came to be linked with the idea of progress in the wake of the French Revolution and hence entangled with one another ("Antislavery and Nationalism," 94).

99. Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*.

100. Trencsényi and Kopeček, *National Romanticism*, 408–20, 440–44.

101. Quoted in Mortara, *Writing for Justice*, xvi.

102. Stewart-Steinberg, "Introduction."

103. *AI*, 1856, 698. Rosetti's ideas were not widely shared.

104. Graetz, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*, 210–11.

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defense of coreligionists in Romania and elsewhere now on the same level as national struggles of "enslaved" nations and abolitionism, French Jewish campaigners hoped to secure the support of informal networks that had already formed in France around both causes.[105] Finally, Crémieux's rhetoric also enabled the Alliance's leadership to frame its actions as genuinely universal, rather than exclusively targeted at Jewish populations.

Failures and Successes of French Jewish Discursive Strategies

The French Jewish leadership's vision of civilizational progress hindered a more realistic grasp of the Romanian political scene. Crémieux relied on the assumption that the ideals of the generation of 1848 revolutionaries remained unchanged and were homogeneous across Europe. He had gotten to know Ion Brătianu and Constantin Rosetti in Paris in the 1840s, during their studies or later, during their exile after the failure of the revolution in Romania. When he delivered his speech in front of Romanian parliamentarians, these *quarante-huitards* had just come back to Bucharest and were now in power.[106] In the short run, the French Jewish leadership failed to achieve its aim in Romania. The 1866 Romanian constitution did not extend rights to Jews. An anti-Jewish riot took place in Bucharest right after Crémieux's intervention. After this event, he expressed his disillusionment with Romanian *quarante-huitards* in bitter terms in the above-mentioned letter to *Le siècle*.[107]

The invocations of slavery did, however, allow the Alliance to internationalize its work on behalf of Jews in southeastern Europe. Crémieux's 1866 speech received significant and durable publicity throughout Europe and across the Atlantic, reaching much broader audiences than earlier actions undertaken on behalf of Romanian Jews. Besides its immediate publication in *Le siècle*, it also appeared in *Archives israélites*. In September the Masonic and freethinking *L'alliance religieuse universelle* published it as a supplement.[108] His visit to Bucharest was also discussed in the other French Jewish newspaper, *L'univers israélite*, as well as in the republican *L'opinion nationale*. Abroad, the Viennese *Die Neuzeit, Das Fremden-Blatt,* and *Das Vaterland* reported on his visit. The *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* published a translation of his speech. In the English-speaking world, the British *Jewish Chronicle* and Isaac Leeser's Philadelphia-based *Occident*

105. Leff, *Sacred Bonds*, 157–99; Nord, *Republican Moment*, 64–89.

106. Jianu, *Circle of Friends*. Brătianu had attended student conferences presided over by Crémieux in Paris in 1847. Posener, *Adolphe Crémieux*, 2:24, 151.

107. *Le siècle*, July 28, 1866.

108. *L'alliance religieuse universelle*, Sept. 15, 1866.

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quoted it.[109] As evidence of its lasting impact, later works, such as Isidore Lœb's brochure addressed to the plenipotentiaries at the 1878 Berlin Congress or the first official history of the Alliance, written by its secretary Narcisse Leven in 1911, still referred to it.[110]

Through such extensive publicity, Crémieux's speech became a template for the defense of Romanian Jews on the international stage. In the following years, the parallel he established between the emancipation of Jews and that of Black slaves became a trope that would be taken up, reused, and sometimes modified by others. Toward the end of the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish War, French Jewish activists redoubled their efforts to secure equal rights for Jews in southeastern Europe. Two decades after the 1856 Congress of Paris, Jewish diplomacy had to ensure that the status of Jews in the region would not be overlooked another time. As the 1878 Berlin Congress approached, French Jewish campaigners started multiplying comparisons with various "others" whom they saw as less civilized, increasingly focusing on groups that were part of Romanian society.

Testifying to the impact of the comparison between Jews and slaves, variations of it began to emerge. Romanian peasants, Russian serfs, the heretical sect of the Skoptsy, and, most notably, Romanian "Gypsies" replaced Black slaves.[111] The "Gypsies"—whose perceived exoticism attracted the interest of French "scientists" and artists alike—had been slaves until recently.[112] The revolutionary program of 1848 in Wallachia had proclaimed the emancipation of Jews and "Gypsy" slaves and promised equal political rights for "all compatriots of another faith."[113] In neighboring Moldavia, Mihail Kogălniceanu's manifesto promised the gradual emancipation of Jews.[114] After the failure of the revolutions, these liberal measures were rescinded. The emancipation of "Gypsy" slaves was achieved in 1856, after a process that took over two decades.[115] In contrast, Romanian governments increasingly curtailed the rights of the Jewish population in the 1860s and 1870s.

109. *AI*, 1866, 711–24; *L'univers israélite*, 1866, 575–77; *L'opinion nationale*, July 30, 1866; *Die Neuzeit*, Aug. 17 and Sept. 7, 1866; *Das Fremden-Blatt*, June 24, 25, and 28, 1866; *Das Vaterland*, June 26, 1866; *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, Aug. 28 and Sept. 4, 1866; *Jewish Chronicle*, Aug. 3 and Oct. 19, 1866; *Occident*, Sept. 1, 1866.

110. Leven, *Cinquante ans d'histoire*; Lœb, *La situation des israélites*, 146–58; Blum, *Adolphe Isaac Cremieux*.

111. AAIU, Roumanie I C 2, Hirsch, Bucharest Committee, to CCAIU (Jan. 1870); AAIU, Roumanie I C 2, Joseph Halfon to CCAIU (Jan. 1874); AAIU, Registre du Secrétariat 42, CCAIU to Charles Netter, Constantinople (Jan. 12, 1877); AAIU, Registre du Secrétariat 47, CCAIU to Joseph von Wertheimer, Vienna (Aug. 7, 1877); Lœb, *La situation des israélites*, 190–92.

112. Pseudoscientific works on "Gypsies" flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century, notably through the writings of Paul Bataillard on eastern Europe.

113. Jianu, *Circle of Friends*, 77.

114. Iancu, *Les juifs en Roumanie*, 50–54.

115. Achim, *Roma in Romanian History*, 103–11.

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By encompassing "Gypsies" in their argumentation, Jewish activists could confront Romanian politicians with their supposed inconsistency more directly.[116] In doing so, they also changed the symbolic other from Blacks to a group that was more relevant for Romanian society. From then on, comparisons between Romanian Jews and "Gypsies," as well as between their respective levels of "civilization," became recurrent.[117] The analogy with slaves proved so evocative that it was taken up by Romanian Jews themselves. Describing their situation as slavery and comparing it to the legal situation of other previously disenfranchised classes of society became a standard tool used by various people to attract western European Jewish attention and strengthen the legitimacy of their demands.[118]

This mode of political mobilization partly relied on the illusion that the abolition of slavery in western Europe had ushered in a new era in which a sense of universal justice guided parliaments and the public sphere that would therefore respond positively to moral demands. It was, however, evident that the comparisons between the fate of coreligionists in southeastern Europe and that of Black slaves were purely rhetorical—and thus possibly prevented more efficient responses. Indeed, in 1878 European Jewish activists obtained mixed results.[119]

Through their legal fight on behalf of Romanian Jewry, Jewish activists were essential players in the transformation of European international law. The Treaty of Berlin set a precedent and ushered in a new understanding of international law in theory if not in practice. It introduced the principle of minority protection as a check on a state's sovereignty and made European powers responsible for imposing this principle.[120] Invocations of slavery, which functioned as a tool of political mobilization and allowed French Jews to inscribe their campaign in the broader framework of international law, represent a fundamental step in the evolution of Jewish advocacy in the nineteenth century.

116. Romanian politicians quickly reacted to this analogy with "Gypsies." After the Berlin Congress, the representative of Romania in Paris denounced the supposed power of the Alliance, noting that European diplomats had not asked Romania to grant political rights to "Gypsies" living in Romania because "no one cares about these 200,000 pagans, who do not have an *Alliance bohémienne universelle* to support them" (*Le temps*, Oct. 5, 1879). I would like to thank Damien Guillaume for this reference.

117. [Lévy,] *L'occident et la persécution israélite*, 66–67; AAIU, Roumanie I C 2, Byk and Lévy, Iași, to CCAIU (Feb. 1, 1870); *AI*, 1874, 685–86.

118. AAIU, Roumanie III B 055bis, Hirsch Kalischer to Crémieux (Mar. 1870); AAIU, Roumanie I C 1, Leib Janovicz, Russian Alliance committee in Bucharest, to CCAIU (Nov. 1879).

119. The tension between the aims of international law and its failure to transcend national politics and protect minorities that James Loeffler identifies as characteristic of interwar Jewish politics and at the basis of Jewish engagement with human rights was thus already present in the late nineteenth century (*Rooted Cosmopolitans*).

120. Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others*, 1–38.

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The hierarchy such invocations implied and the failure of Jewish diplomacy to achieve its goal in the short term were not lost on the coreligionists who had been at the receiving end of western European Jews' humanitarian politics. By rooting their advocacy for Jews in southeastern Europe in the Jewish past and connecting it to contemporary struggles, French Jews had redefined their relationship to Jews elsewhere as well as to the majority society. The idea of slavery continued to shape the political imagination of actors engaged in various types of emancipationist politics. It remained a tool for rethinking the relationship between western and eastern European Jewries. Somewhat ironically, the abolitionists of yesterday became the slaves of today at the turn of the century. Following the emergence of organized political antisemitism in western Europe, eastern European proponents of Jewish nationalism began to depict Western, emancipated Jewry's life as "slavery in freedom," with "inner bondage" having replaced "external bondage."[121]

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Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank François Guesnet, Axel Körner, and Lisa Moses Leff for their feedback on earlier versions of this article. She is also indebted to Charlotte Faucher for her careful reading, as well as to the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable suggestions.

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121. The expressions are by Achad ha-Am and Simon Dubnow, respectively. See Birnbaum, "Absence of an Encounter," 270–71.

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