



PROTESTERS GATHER outside the French Embassy in Tel Aviv on Sunday to demand justice for Sarah Halimi, who was murdered by an antisemitic assailant in her apartment in Paris in 2017. (Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90)

Injustices for French Jews from Dreyfus to Halimi make the case for aliyah

• By BEN STONE

It has been over a century since the infamous Dreyfus affair divided the French Republic. As one of the most pronounced miscarriages of justice, stemming from antisemitism, this scandal has become an integral part of the French baccalaureate curriculum, in hopes that history wouldn't repeat itself. But with the recent verdict of the Sarah Halimi trial appeal, it seems as if France hasn't learned much in the 127 years since 1894.

The Dreyfus affair was a political crisis in which French Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus was convicted of treason, and exiled for giving military secrets to Germany, only to be exonerated years later, after his imprisonment had already taken its toll on his health. Evidence supporting the conviction of the Jewish captain was very flimsy, yet many anti-Jewish groups campaigned against Dreyfus. In his famous letter to the state, "J'accuse," Emile Zola exposed the injustice at hand. With much media coverage and attention, people became divided into two camps. Eventually, Dreyfus was cleared of all accusations, but his life and career had already been ruined, simply because he was Jewish.

The father of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, was a Vien-

nese newspaper man at the time. He was present on the Champs-Élysées when he heard mobs shouting "Kill the traitor," "Kill the Jew". This was a pivotal moment for Herzl, as he realized that this was bigger than just one military captain, but representative of a rising wave of European antisemitism. At the time of the Dreyfus affair, European Jews had nowhere to turn, no Land of Israel to return to safely. This was one of the catalysts of political Zionism.

In 2017, 65-year old Sarah Halimi, who was not as lucky as Dreyfus, was tortured and killed simply because she was Jewish. Halimi lived and died in the Belleville suburb of Paris. The 27-year-old Kobili Traoré, who was her neighbor, would often insult Halimi and yell antisemitic slurs. One day in April 2017, he broke into her apartment and beat her, leaving 22 fractures in her bones, before throwing her off her third floor balcony yelling "Allahu Akbar" and "I killed the *Shaitan* [Satan]."

The events following this horrific murder were and still are a disgrace to the French media and justice system. It took three months before this incident was characterized as antisemitic, and almost a year to add antisemitism to the charges of the case, all while Traoré was put into a mental clinic and was deemed

unfit for trial. After almost two years, French President Emmanuel Macron stated that Traoré, who had a long criminal history, would finally have a trial. The shocking verdict was: "not criminally responsible," because he had smoked weed the day of her murder.

I THINK they must have misinterpreted the idea of decriminalizing marijuana. After multiple appeals by her family and public figures such as French intellectual Bernard-Henri Levy, this decision was upheld by both the Paris Court of Appeals in 2019 and in 2021 by the Court of Cassation, the supreme French court of appeals.

In an almost parallel event however, a man who was both drunk and high on cocaine threw his neighbor's dog out the window in Marseilles. In 2019, a French court ruled the verdict as guilty, with no temporary insanity appeal, and sentenced the man to two years in prison. Under one justice system, a man can be sent to prison for killing a dog, but another is set free after killing a Jew.

The implications of this scandalous and unjust verdict for French Jews are scary. It is impossible for a single French Jew to feel safe if a killer is not held responsible for a gruesome murder simply because he smoked a joint. It is easy for

us to read between the lines of the verdict and feel the underlying antisemitism that is so ingrained in French culture.

This is a paradox because France is also home to the world's third largest Jewish population, at around 500,000. But there is a trend that will affect this number: French Jews are fleeing their country to return to their homeland of Israel. In 2019, Macron stated that antisemitism was at its highest since World War II, and the interior

minister warned that it was "spreading like poison." With 89% of French Jewish students experiencing antisemitism, according to one poll, and Jews being the target of 40% of racially motivated attacks, it is no surprise that French Jews are packing up and leaving. After the former Soviet Union and the United States, France is the third largest source of immigrants to Israel, with thousands of French Jews making aliyah each year.

In theory, the French baccalaureate system puts emphasis on the importance of the Dreyfus affair and civic duty. In practice, French Jews will look out at the world and see the injustices occurring. They will understand the need for armed police standing at the doors of Jewish schools and synagogues. They will get dirty looks on the subway and see graffiti about Jews and Palestine. This is why French Jews, many of whom have been here for generations, are

moving to Israel; a "luxury" that wasn't available at the time of the Dreyfus affair. And let me tell you, it's definitely not to drink Tubi or eat hummus.

The writer is a graduate student at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, who grew up between Philadelphia, Paris, and New York, with an American father and French mother. He is also a competitive fencer, representing his university and Team USA at national and international competitions.