

On the Sociological Significance of the American Jewish Experience: Boundary Blurring, Assimilation, and Pluralism

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In thinking about the results reported here from the 2000/01 NJPS, it is critical to have a clear-eyed view of how the social landscape in which American Jews find themselves has changed in the post-World War II period. Some of the papers (Phillips and Fishman; Phillips and Kelner) argue that a soft version of rational choice can help to shed light on such key indicators of the contemporary Jewish situation as intermarriage, and I agree that it can. But a choice-based framework is useful only insofar as one has a firm conceptual grip on the range of options faced by minority individuals, along with their perceived benefits, risks, and costs. If that configuration has changed substantially over time, past research may not give useful guidance, indeed may be fundamentally incommensurate with the findings from new data. The applicability of past models is, quite appropriately, called into question by some of the papers, most notably, Phillips and Kelner.

The concept of a social boundary provides a useful way of specifying some of the major changes that have taken place in the last six decades or so, as well as of identifying the value of the American Jewish case for comparative studies. By a boundary, I mean a social distinction that individuals make in their everyday lives and that shapes their actions and mental orientations towards others; it is typically embedded in a variety of social and cultural differences between groups that give a boundary concrete significance (so that those on one side think of those on the other, "they are not like us because ..."). When we discuss ethnicity, the kinds of boundaries we invoke have the character that Weber attributed to the ethnic group: namely, that they are rooted in a "subjective belief in common descent"—i.e., in a shared history based on a common point of origin in the past, which may be real or putative. Admittedly, this subjective belief in a shared history may be felt more by one side of a boundary than the other and thus, to a greater or lesser extent, the boundary may be imposed, as is typically the case with race-like distinctions.

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When we discuss religion, boundaries are more firmly embedded in institutional matrices than is usually the case with ethnicity: religions, for example, typically have unambiguous rules for deciding who is a member by virtue of birth and well-specified processes for converting those who were originally members of other religions. This and other aspects of religious groups (e.g., services that bring members of a religious community together, where they can observe and interact with other members) render groups where ethnicity and religion are fused, as is the case with Jews and a few other groups, more resistant to assimilation than are most other ethnic groups. Predominantly Catholic ethnic groups, like the Italians, for instance, had some religious elements as part of their "ethnic" culture and belonged to nationality-based parishes in their early years of settlement, but as their subsequent generations moved up socioeconomically and moved out of ethnic neighborhoods, they entered multi-ethnic parishes and established close relationships with Catholics of other ethnic origins.

Yet the most significant feature of the contemporary situation of American Jews, I will argue here, is the very significant blurring of boundaries between Jews and other Americans, especially Christians and the non-religious. A prime indicator of this blurring is the debate over the "number" of Jews that arose from the 2000/01 NJPS, which is discussed in this volume by Hartman and Kaufman; and a new dimension of this uncertainty is revealed by Phillips and Kelner's analysis of dual religious affiliation (cf. Goldscheider 2003). The debate tells us that a non-trivial set of individuals is positioned ambiguously with respect to Jewish/Gentile boundaries, so that their placement in one or the other category is inherently a matter of definition. The blurring is not limited to these individuals, however, but encompasses a much larger portion of Jews and non-Jews. How did this state come about and what does it mean?

Alba and Nee (2003), building upon distinctions introduced by Zolberg and Long (1999) and Bauböck (1994), identify blurring as one of the boundary processes that can effect assimilation. The useful comparison here is to boundary crossing, the conventional idea of assimilation, whereby individuals detach themselves from one group and, by shedding its characteristics and taking on new ones, attempt to join another (Gordon 1964). Boundary crossing represents the conception of assimilation we have inherited from the literature of the several decades following the end of World War II: the distinction between the groups is clear—"bright" in many cases, in the sense that it is socially salient—and individuals must change themselves in order move from one to the other (Alba 2005). Such situations arise in an unambiguous minority-majority context, where members of the minority have a strong incentive to make the attempt because of the higher status attainable as a member of the majority (hence, the theories of religious conversion as a way of addressing status inconsistency, which however are not upheld by Phillips and Kelman), but the process is not without risk because there is no guarantee of acceptance by the majority (Child 1943). Indeed, the Jewish experience offers bitter lessons about these risks, for even ini-

tially great success may be followed by discrimination and exclusion. One doesn't have to think here only of the well-known assimilation of German Jews prior to the Third Reich (e.g., Klemperer 1998). Writing in a vivid manner that seems to recall experiences that, if not personal, were known from friends and acquaintances, Gordon (1964:111-12), né Goldberg, plaintively states:

The second generation found a much more complex situation. Many of them believed they heard the siren call of welcome to the social cliques, clubs, and institutions of white Protestant America. After all, it was simply a matter of learning American ways, was it not, and had they not grown up as Americans and were they not culturally different from their parents, the greenhorns? Or perhaps an especially eager one reasoned, like the Jewish protagonist of Myron Kaufmann's novel, *Remember Me to God*, bucking for membership in the prestigious club system of Harvard undergraduate social life: If only I can go the last few steps in Ivy League manners and behavior, they will surely recognize that I am one of them and take me in. But, Brooks Brothers suit notwithstanding, the doors of the fraternity house, the city men's club, and the country club were slammed in the face of the immigrant's offspring...And so the rebuffed one returned to the homelier but dependable comfort of the communal institutions of his ancestral group. There he found his fellows of the same generation who had never stirred from the home fires at all.

Phillip Roth's recent novel, *The Plot Against America*, is a reminder of the bright boundaries that once governed Jewish-Gentile relations in the U.S. That Roth gives the family at the center of the story the identity of his own family and places himself as a main protagonist reveals the autobiographical intent behind the blatantly fictional plot—the reader is to understand that some qualities of the experiences portrayed are the novelist's, the way he remembers things. The story is set at the time of the 1940 Presidential election, and the Roth family of that era lives its intimate social life in an almost hermetically sealed Jewish world of relatives and of friends who share the same ethnicity and religion. Relations with Gentiles do occur but they are strongly colored by their boundary-spanning character, and the Roths are always aware of their own vulnerability in a Christian-dominated society. Indeed, the entire social world is viewed by the family in terms of a Jewish/Christian division. One of the main themes of the book is the dangers for Jews of living in such a society, where an election, which in the novel brings the Nazi-friendly Charles Lindbergh to the Presidency, can threaten one's way of life, even one's existence.

Assimilation is still possible in a bright-boundary minority-majority situation, but it takes a specific form, akin to a conversion, i.e., a departure from one group and a discarding of signs of membership in it, linked to an attempt to enter into another, with all of the social and psychic burdens a conversion process entails—growing distance from peers, feelings of disloyalty, and anxieties about acceptance. Roth gives us an example of this, too, in his novel, *The Human Stain*, loosely based on the life of the New York literary critic and essayist, Anatole Broyard, who lived his adult life as a white man but was posthumously revealed to have been born black. "Passing" in racially divided society is the extreme case

of assimilation across a bright boundary, because of the risks involved and the need to conceal one's origin, perhaps even from those closest to oneself. Broyard's passing required that he cut himself off from his black relatives, and his children, who did not know of his racial past, only met them at his funeral, according to Henry Louis Gates (1998). Bright boundaries can be expected to be intimidating to the great majority of a minority group, unwilling to undertake the risks and pain assumed by an Anatole Broyard.

For many Jews today, the bright boundary described by Roth's novel no longer accords with their experience. The bright boundary describes a discontinuous world, where relations within the group have a fundamentally different character from relations between group members and outsiders. Instead, many Jews have a more seamless experience, in which on many occasions (but not all) the categories of "Jew" and "Gentile" do not seem relevant to their relationships with individuals who are non-Jewish. On such occasions, other social identities come into play, and what may dominate is one that they share, such as being professional colleagues or even spouses. I am being deliberately vague about whether the "many" Jews for whom this may be true or a majority or not, for I do not know. I am confident that it is much larger number than in the past, just as I am confident that it not true of all Jews, that it would not be true of the great majority of the Orthodox, for example.

The altered situation just described is consistent with the Alba and Nee (2003) definition of "assimilation": the "decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences." "Decline" means here that a distinction attenuates in salience, that the occurrences for which it is relevant diminish in number and contract to fewer and fewer domains of social life. From the perspective of an ethnic minority, its members' ethnic origins become less and less relevant in relation to the members of another ethnic group (typically, but not necessarily, the ethnic majority group). This can happen for only a few individuals or on a large scale, up to that of the group itself. "Decline" need not mean disappearance: even when a distinction has declined in relevance, it may certainly be relevant in some situations.

In the Jewish case, this decline, which has happened on a substantial scale, is a by-product of a fundamental change to a boundary: the boundary has become blurred in important respects. Experiences and outlooks that were once distinctive to each side of the boundary are now shared to a significant extent. The zone of ambiguity is even greater because some individuals who at times appear to belong to one side of the boundary can successfully present themselves as members, or at least fellow travelers, of the other. This latter point is not simply a matter of individuals who belong to both sides of the boundary, described by Philips and Kelner, though dual membership certainly contributes to boundary blurring. It is also a matter of the more widespread phenomenon of dual practices: families where Jewish and Christian holidays are maintained, for example. Though there is an understandable tendency to see this phenomenon in the literature on Jews

mainly from the Jewish side, i.e., the otherwise Jewish families that celebrate Christmas (Fishman 2004), it should also be seen from the Christian side, i.e., the Christians, or at least non-Jews, who attend Passover seders or bar or bat Mitzvahs, which are, for many, as much family as religious affairs. To put matters in terms of the NJPS measures, some non-Jews are at least mildly observant by the scale employed by Rebhun and Levy.

This sort of religious (and ethnic) melding suggests the potential importance of boundary blurring. Moreover, the social psychology of assimilation is quite different in this situation from what it is in the bright-boundary case (the latter described elegantly by Child 1943). When boundaries are blurred, assimilation is likely to be eased insofar as the individuals undergoing it do not sense a rupture between participation in mainstream institutions and familiar social and cultural practices and identities; thus, they may not feel *forced to choose* between the mainstream and their group of origin. Moreover, individuals are likely to see other co-ethnics in the same situation as themselves, and therefore do not experience a sense of detachment from the group of origin. In the general case, assimilation of this type involves intermediate, or hyphenated, stages that allow individuals to see themselves, either simultaneously or sequentially, as members of an ethnic minority and of the mainstream.

An argument made by Alba and Nee is that boundary blurring is relatively common in U.S. minority-majority relations because the mainstream culture is relatively porous and absorbs elements of the minority culture (see also Alba 2005). In other words, boundary blurring is brought about because cultural change is not limited to the minority group; it occurs to the majority group as well, and therefore the process of acculturation is to some extent a two-sided affair. (This, it should be noted, contrasts with Gordon's [1964: 109-10] famous characterization of acculturation as a one-way process.)

Perhaps no group better exemplifies this feature of the U.S. context than American Jews, who have had a major impact on relatively elite strata of their society's culture. This impact is apparent if one looks at the intellectual, artistic, and scientific aspects of the mainstream culture. The prominence of Jews in these domains cannot be understood as simply a matter of the successful adaptation by individuals to the requirements of certain types of careers; if that were true, then Jewish visibility could still be comprehended by the older conception of acculturation as a largely one-way process. Instead, as the examples of such novelists as Roth and Saul Bellow demonstrate, Jews have in many cases brought into the mainstream viewpoints and values that have origins in the Jewish immigrant, ethnic, or religious experience; to be sure, they have also been shaped by the milieus to which they have aspired. But it is fair, in my opinion, to say that Jews have contributed mightily to a transformation of these milieus, making them unrecognizable to those who inhabited them before the mid-20th century.

Consider, as an example, elite institutions of higher education. Before mid-century, universities such as Harvard attempted to limit the Jewish presence among

students and, even more so, on the faculty, partly in order to preserve a gentlemanly culture that valorized adaptation to the group over the rigors of individual achievement (Steinberg 1989). According to Morton and Phyllis Keller in their book, *Making Harvard Modern* (2001), as Jews became more numerous among faculty and students, Harvard was transformed, from the clubby atmosphere of a training ground for Protestant social and business elites to a more meritocratic institution emphasizing intellectual and scientific excellence.¹ As part of the same transformation, the elite institutions went from places where Protestant versions of Christianity were more or less “established”—e.g., through required student attendance at chapel services—to contemporary temples of “established nonbelief,” to quote the historian George Marsden (1994; see also Hollinger 1996). Reports of George W. Bush’s academic career at Yale and then Harvard in the late 1960s and early 1970s demonstrate that the older culture had not entirely disappeared, but his reported unease there, especially during his undergraduate days at Yale, suggest strongly that it had lost its previous position of hegemony—the changes at Ivy League institutions and, no doubt, many others no longer coincided with the Protestant establishment culture that the Bush family represented. But despite this example, identified with one point on a spectrum, the cultural changes were absorbed by many other non-Jews who, by virtue of family origins, belonged to the social milieus associated with such elite institutions or who aspired to them.

One has to be careful here not to overstate matters and make Jews entirely responsible for what Hollinger (1996) has labeled as the “de-Christianization” of American public culture. As he argues in his careful account, the liberal Protestants who dominated the leadership of the universities in the early 20th century and constituted what intellectual public culture there was were drifting in this direction in any event; however, the arrival at the universities of “free-thinking Jews,” whose number soared during the 30s because of the exodus of Jewish intellectuals and academics from Europe, both sped the process and solidified the changes. Hollinger (1996: 27) aptly describes the mutual influences in the following way:

And this secular vision became a common possession of the American academic and literary intelligentsia during the middle decades of the century.

The men and women who made up this intelligentsia were cultural products of a process of accommodation that left both Jews and Gentiles different from what they would have been had they not interacted with one another.

Changes of the sort just identified are impacts on specific milieus within the mainstream society and culture, both of which are highly variegated, with con-

¹ “More meritocratic” obviously leaves room for considerable slippage from full-fledged openness; besides the well-known scarcity of women and minorities on the faculties of these institutions, there is also, in my view, a more hidden exclusion of Catholic ethnics (see Alba 2006; Alba and Abdel-Hady 2005).

siderable variation by social class, region, and religion, to name just a few of the framing dimensions. The cultural impact of American Jews has certainly not been spread uniformly throughout American society. It has, for instance, been geographically concentrated, more profound in urban America and on the coasts than on, say, the rural areas of the Midwest or South (in blue rather than red areas, to employ a contemporary political idiom). It has also been deeper on the upper middle class, where educational and professional accomplishments are especially valorized. But to acknowledge that the impact has been thinner on other parts of the mainstream does not take away from its boundary-blurring aspect, since the impact has been most intense in the milieus in which Jews are themselves most concentrated and thus affects the character of their relations with non-Jews.

The story of how such changes came about remains to be told. It will certainly be complex and cannot be reduced to the smooth intellectual transmission of new views and values. As Perlmann and Waldinger (1997) argue, Jews made strenuous collective efforts, through legal and political means, to overcome the prejudice and discrimination of the Christian majority. In the immediate post-War period, Jewish organizations campaigned intensely against the use of religious and racial criteria in university and professional-school admissions. And they had considerable success: for example, in New York, where a number of prestigious, exclusionary institutions, such as Columbia and Cornell, were located, the New York City Council adopted legislation in 1946 threatening the tax-exempt status of nonsectarian colleges and universities that discriminated based on race or religion; and the New York State Legislature followed with an anti-discrimination statute in 1948. That these laws were in fact successful is demonstrated by, for example, the increase in the Jewish percentage among New York's medical students from 15 percent in 1948 to about 50 percent by the mid-1950s (Dinnerstein 1994). These successes helped not only Jews but also other groups that were behind them in the queue of educational and occupational mobility. They led to institutional openings that were subsequently widened by the Civil Rights movement and the politics of inclusion of the 1960s and to a weakening of the ideological support for other forms of ethnic and racial discrimination.

Another part of the script must be given over to a recognition of the civic incorporation of Judaism. In part, this incorporation is an indirect impact of Hitler, whose relentless anti-Semitism gave Jews a prominent part in the Allied war effort (even if Allied leaders tried at the same time not to hear or see the carnage inflicted on European Jews) and who made anti-Semitism disreputable. In part, it is due to the success of Jews in the post-War period in gaining state recognition for their holidays (I owe this point to Aristide Zolberg). This recognition could be expressed by mundane alterations as suspension of ordinary parking regulations on Jewish holy days (as has happened in New York City) or the closing of schools on those days. Civic incorporation does not simply facilitate the practices of a religious minority but brings it closer in status to established religions.

A side benefit is that it informs outsiders about some of the rudiments of a religion; surely, a much larger fraction of the Gentile population now knows about the high holy days than would have been the case in the early 20th century.

A third aspect of the story is the group, rather than individual, mobility that has carried many Jews into relatively elite milieus. There is a useful contrast here to the experiences of Catholic ethnics, who, in attempting to enter the ranks of academics, mostly do so as individuals who present themselves as emancipated from ethnic and religious traditions (which tend to be seen, in any event, as incompatible with, or at least impeding, unfettered thought and inquiry). But because Jewish entry into intellectual and professional occupations has been on a large scale, with individuals thus aware of one another and of the similarity in their experiences, it has been easier for them to avoid conceding completely to the view that the culture of the strata to which they aspire is superior and deserves to be emulated, more or less in its entirety. They were helped in this respect as well by having to confront an overt and thus readily identifiable anti-Semitism, whose existence stimulated the recognition of a collective plight and cooperation to combat it. That U.S. Jews had, as part of their heritage, family and collective memories of bitter minority experiences in European societies distinguished them from most of the other southern and eastern European groups and also made it easier for them to cooperate against anti-Semitism.

I believe that this sketch can help to resolve some of the important questions that Hartman and Kaufman raise about interpreting contemporary American Jewish experience. They are skeptical for instance about the symbolic ethnicity and religion notions formulated by Gans (1979, 1994) and, in the case of ethnicity, empirically explored by Alba (1990) and Waters (1990). Hartman and Kaufman point to the largely behavioral conception of Gans and argue that it overlooks the dimensions of meaning that might give greater depth to what appears to be a rather superficial symbolic religion or ethnicity. The blurred boundary idea in one way supports Gans's conception while in another way it feeds the skepticism of Hartman and Kaufman. At the heart of Gans's exposition is the hypothesis that, in contemporary Americans society, many Jews seek forms and expressions of identity that are compatible with navigating unhindered in social and professional worlds that are ethnically and religiously mixed. It seems to me that the findings from the NJPS are quite consistent with this hypothesis: for instance, Hurst and Mott show that a Jewish upbringing can have secular pay-offs, by translating into higher educational attainment and economic success (and, no doubt, professional standing); however, in all their findings, it is the "moderate" level of religiosity that produces the greatest likelihood of secular achievement. Further, Rebhun and Levy demonstrate by comparing American and Israeli Jews that "American Jews are polarized with a large proportion who observes only Jewish holidays and a small segment which maintains an intensive Jewish life-style." Net of a variety of controls, being a Jew in the United States rather than Israel is negatively linked to more demanding practices, such as not

handling money on the Sabbath or maintaining separate dishes in the home. In addition, Klaff finds (in Table 1) a substantial concentration of American Jews in categories of denominational affiliation and self-identity where the demands of religious observance are likely to be weak to very weak: more than half are unaffiliated, and the great majority of those identify with Reform or with no denomination at all. Another sixth belong to and identify with Reform. Nearly three-quarters, in other words, are in categories where religious observance, to the extent there is any, is quite compatible with considerable intermixing with Gentiles (and the same is, no doubt, true for a significant fraction of the Conservative denomination, so that the fraction is an underestimate).

Nevertheless, Hartman and Kaufman are right to insist that muted observance does not mean the absence of Jewish identity (and, to be fair to Gans, he certainly did not intend the symbolic ethnicity concept to be equated with the extinction of ethnicity). However, that identity now takes shape and expresses itself within a context that, for many Jews, is fundamentally different from that faced by previous generations. Take the case of support for Israel: that support, often vociferously expressed, is a public badge of membership for a large portion of the American Jewish population (the findings reported here by Kadushin and Kotler-Berkowitz suggest how diffused it is, since it is bound strongly neither to memberships in Jewish organizations nor to embeddedness in Jewish networks). Such support seems on its face to run the risk of conflict with the Gentile majority in America (the linkage of symbolic ethnicity with political interest in homelands has long struck me as the most questionable part of the symbolic ethnicity thesis; see Gans 1979; cf. Alba and Nee 2003:145-53). Yet, remarkably, this happens only to a limited extent, for much of Gentile America has accepted support for Israel as its own cause (this seems to me certainly true if we judge matters by the policies of the U.S. government). This is, once again, an aspect of boundary blurring, of a weakened differentiation between Jews and non-Jews. Its most revealing facet is the strong support for Israel offered by many evangelical Christian leaders, who in past generations would have probably been associated with public expressions of anti-Semitism and who, despite the opinions sometimes voiced in secular America, are not all offering their support in order to hasten the Rapture.

What is the broader significance of the American Jewish case for the study of ethnicity? I can think of three levels on which this question can be answered. To begin with, the growing integration of Jews into the mainstream of American society is key to any understanding of the broader pattern of white ethnic assimilation, especially in the post-World War II period. Not only were Jews the "hard" case among the groups of European origin—while the Catholics also faced intense discrimination and confronted disparaging stereotypes, they were still, after all, Christian—but in struggling to achieve inroads into the mainstream and especially into professional spheres, Jews created openings that others were able to use as well. I have already noted, for instance, their critical role in forcing open the

admission to elite universities and to professional schools. These openings, combined with the socioeconomic ascent of the Catholic ethnics, have over time contributed to the emergence of Catholics as the largest religious group among students at all levels of the college and university system. For instance, in fall, 2002, according to UCLA's annual national survey of American freshmen, Catholics amounted to 30 percent of the freshmen class then entering 4-year colleges and universities (Sax et al. 2002). To be sure, they constituted a large fraction of the freshmen at Catholic institutions of higher education. However, they were also 28 percent of the entrants at the most highly selective private universities (a few of which are Catholic; the survey does not offer a nonsectarian version of this category); no Protestant denomination nor Judaism comes close to matching this figure. A separate survey of 2003 freshmen at elite colleges and universities, conducted by a team headed by Douglas Massey (Massey et al. 2002), confirms this finding for non-Catholic institutions.² It found that 28 percent of non-Hispanic white freshmen came from Catholic backgrounds, as 17 percent among Asians, 16 percent among blacks, and 67 percent among Hispanics.

On a second plane, the Jewish case can give us great insight into a process of integration and, I dare say, assimilation that we have until now glimpsed only very imperfectly. That process is the one I have described as boundary blurring, which differs from the most conventional type of assimilation, boundary crossing, in very significant ways: change is to some extent two sided, affecting the majority group as well as the minority; individuals need not conceive of themselves as self-consciously assimilating, i.e., transforming themselves in order to fit into a new social milieu and, in doing so, facing a possibly intimidating risk of rejection; and the sense of detachment from the group of origin, which goes hand in hand with the perception of a risk of the charge of disloyalty, is all the less likely because the individual is aware of sharing the same experiences as other co-ethnics. As I also noted, assimilation in a blurred-boundary context lends itself to hyphenated, if not hybrid, identities, which allow individuals to feel that they remain part of the group of origin.

The American Jewish case is not just a prime instance of assimilation through boundary blurring; it is also, quite importantly, a well-documented one. Except for African Americans, the most complete research record we possess is for Jews (my statement does not mean that it is as complete as it should be): the study of Jews in American society goes back decades and includes the collection of important data sets such as the NJPS. Of course, the notion of boundary blurring implies that a full understanding cannot come from an exclusive focus on changes in the Jewish population; we also have to study the changes in the majority population, or at least those segments of it most likely to interact with Jews. The record is less complete when it comes this side of the process, but it is not entirely absent. At a minimum, we have a fairly continuous record of public-

² I am grateful to Mary Fisher for preparing these special tabulations for me.

opinion survey questions about attitudes towards Jews. Shamefully, we do not possess a comparable record for Catholics or Catholic ethnics, despite the early sociological interest in the problematic position of the southern Italians (Whyte 1955; Gans 1962). The record of survey questions more or less comes to a halt in the late 1970s, about the time that the massive scale of Catholic entry into the mainstream was becoming apparent.³ This lacuna prevents us from examining continuing prejudices against the Catholic ethnics and their relationship to the sparse representation of this group in certain elite sectors, such as university faculty (Alba 2006).

Finally, the boundary-blurring of the American context and its ramifications for the incorporation of American Jews into the mainstream society and, indeed, into some of its most elite strata deserve scrutiny at this moment in history because they can yield clues about how religious pluralism can be attained for other excluded groups, most notably perhaps, the Muslims of western Europe. I have written at some length elsewhere about bright-boundary aspects of the situations of second-generation Muslims in France and Germany (Alba 2005), and I will therefore not repeat much of it here. Suffice to say that the second generation, while dissatisfied with the humble status of immigrant parents, experiences great difficulties, including overt discrimination, in attempting to attain a successful socioeconomic integration into these societies (Silberman, et al. 2006). This leads many of its members to resort to Islam as a way of claiming "dignity," to borrow the nice formulation of Farhad Khosrokhavar (2005). However, attachment to Islam cannot solve the basic dilemma, for in European societies Muslims confront, on the one hand, majority populations that are mainly secular and therefore suspicious of claims based on religion and its requirements and, on the other, societal institutions and national identities that remain anchored to an important extent in Christianity. To take just a single telling example: though France has adopted *laïcité* as its state ideology, about half of the dozen or so public holidays in France are Catholic in origin; as the number indicates, these are not limited to Christmas and Easter but include the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (August 15) and others. No Muslim holiday is accorded an equivalent recognition (the Stasi Commission, which recommended adoption of a law against the headscarf, also advocated state recognition of one Muslim and one Jewish holiday, but this part of its agenda was dropped by legislators).

In the long run, the blurring of boundaries may be essential for a successful integration of the second and third generations of such groups as the Pakistanis in Great Britain or the North Africans in France. The contemporary discussion in Europe is impoverished insofar as the main alternatives under discussion are an assimilation that is conceived to be of the rigid boundary-crossing sort or a vaguely imagined multiculturalism. The current situation does not seem sustainable. As Olivier Roy (2005) points out, the aggrieved sense of exclusion felt by

³ The honorable exception to my statement is the survey research of Andrew Greeley.

many Muslims who have grown up in Europe creates a huge pool of potential recruits for fundamentalist Islamic movements. The exclusion, it must be said, is not limited to socioeconomic opportunities. In a deep sense, it encompasses also the imaginative aspects of identity, the ability to envision oneself as a full-fledged member of the surrounding social order. To judge from the attacks on the London subways and buses that are fresh as I write this essay, this ability is impeded for some part of the second generation in Europe. This should be seen as one aspect of the bright boundary that separates young Muslims from the mainstream of European societies.

Note: For References, refer to the Bibliography at the end of this issue.