

Introduction

Toward a Counterhistory

Who controls American intellectual life? Sociologists, fond of this kind of question, published a rigorous study in the 1970s comparing the reputations of various figures of the intellectual elite: Daniel Bell is at the top of the list of the first ten names, arranged in alphabetical order, along with John Kenneth Galbraith, Norman Mailer, and Edmund Wilson, while both David Riesman and Hannah Arendt are also mentioned.¹ When, not long after, in the spring of 1981, six hundred intellectuals, scholars, and politicians in France were asked what person most strongly influenced them, almost a quarter of those polled unhesitatingly named Claude Lévi-Strauss, who received nearly twenty votes more than his friend Raymond Aron, who himself was slightly ahead of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Fernand Braudel.² Daniel Bell in the United States, Claude Lévi-Strauss in France, as well as most of the people mentioned, bear witness to the privileged influence the social sciences have today in the life of ideas.

Although both Bell and Lévi-Strauss were penetrating observers of modern or traditional societies, everything separates them. Both descended from European Judaism; Claude Lévi-Strauss, deeply assimilated according to the French universalist logic of integration, deliberately distanced himself from it, whereas Daniel Bell represents the quintessence of the New York Jewish intellectual whose points of reference remain those of the Eastern European Jewish world of long ago. The author of *Tristes Tropiques* belongs to the Jewish upper-middle

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class that was in its time received with honors by Napoleon III and the court. It is true that during his adolescence in Versailles, he lived for a few years in the home of his maternal grandfather, who was a rabbi; although he did have his Bar Mitzvah, he still decidedly distanced himself from Judaism, following the example of his parents, for whom Judaism “was already no more than a memory.” Of course, Lévi-Strauss “knows he’s Jewish”; he belongs to a specific milieu, all the more so when in 1932 he married Dina Dreyfus. Moving from Marseille to Martinique in February 1941, he confessed, “I already felt I was prey for the concentration camp,” and he discovered, too, that other passengers on board were Jewish “like me.”³ And, if he emphasizes that “the abominable, devastating catastrophe that has destroyed a fraction of humanity to which I belong . . . has substantially affected my destiny,”⁴ it’s rather the ways of thinking of the Bororos or the Nambikwaras he sets at the heart of his existence and his work, and it’s the virtues of Buddhism he celebrates, not those of Judaism.⁵ The cultural relativism that seems to come from his ethnographic approach, from which Jews are excluded, provoked the severe condemnation of Emmanuel Lévinas, who writes, “Modern atheism is not the negation of God. It is the absolute indifference of *Tristes Tropiques*. I think this is the most atheistic book written in recent times, this absolutely confused and confusing book. It threatens Judaism as well as the Hegelian and sociological vision of history.”⁶ If some people persist in adventurous psychological exegeses in seeing Lévi-Strauss not as a prophet but actually as a “Jewish theologian manqué,”⁷ it is still true that the theoretician of structural anthropology completely distanced himself from a culture linked to his own past. Commentators think they can include him, despite everything, among the “meta-rabbis” (to use George Steiner’s phrase),⁸ who since the time of Spinoza reveal in their work an implicit Jewish sensibility, even though they broke explicitly with their culture. Others, in the same sense, are quick to see in him “a non-Jewish Jew,” using the questionable image advanced by Isaac Deutscher.⁹ Here we will distance ourselves from such haphazard interpretations. On the contrary, the author of *Tristes Tropiques* represents the quintessential thinker, who, in his life as well as in the logic of his scientific method, put an end to a specific past that did nothing to fertilize his imagination.

Daniel Bell, by contrast, remained the child of the Jewish lower

classes from the Bronx and Lower East Side slums, with Yiddish as his mother tongue. He was the descendant of those Eastern European Jews attached to a culture and to traditions that were not radically overturned by the Age of Enlightenment, people from that vast continent suddenly transposed almost intact at the end of the nineteenth century into *Goldene America* and never assimilated into the universalist values as most Jews from Western Europe have since. He still belongs to that migratory wave that at the turn of the century carried more than three million Yiddish-speaking people away to the New World, among whom were a number of Orthodox Jews and revolutionaries, poets, writers, musicians—to such a point that “risen up from the sea, deposited on its shores, a language without antecedent in the country. . . . This rift marks the birth of Yiddish modernity.”¹⁰ Like so many of these destitute émigrés, Bell fought in the streets, went to *heder*, became a socialist, campaigned for the Jewish proletariat. He met Martin Buber in New York. In the company of Nathan Glazer and Irving Kristol, along with their wives, he would devote long evenings to studying the Talmud, line by line, and the *Mishne Torah* by Maimonides. With his New York intellectual friends, he lived in the heart of the “Upper West Side kibbutz,” as he himself calls it.¹¹ Of Polish origin, his father’s name was Bolotsky or Karlinsky—it didn’t matter; his mental universe was one of Jewish humor, of *pilpul*, of the Torah, but also of trade unionism and of a socialism hostile to communism. In his eyes, “a foreigner in every country, having no *yichus* [family tree, lineage], stripped of any real home. . . . The main thing was to find one, like every generation in exile, in *galut* [exile, diaspora].”¹² Quoting Maimonides, consulting the rabbi of Berdichev, discussing the work of the most erudite contemporary commentators such as Emil Fackenheim, challenging the “lachrymose” concepts of a sentimental Judaism presenting itself as an eternal victim, Bell adheres to transmission, to fidelity to his father and wants to be responsible for his Jewish past.¹³ With Nathan Glazer and Irving Howe, the author of the classic *World of Our Fathers*, which tells the history of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in America, but also with Seymour Martin Lipset and Philip Selznick, Bell participated in the epic of New York Jewish radicalism centered around the journal *Dissent*, which remained proud of the Jewish heritage that resulted “from a tension between

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universalism and particularism.” A child of the Torah and of *Das Kapital*, Bell was rejected by Columbia University, which was at the time openly anti-Semitic. Bell did not follow a normal university path: he received only one doctorate on the strength of his achievements; he preferred to lead worker’s struggles in the streets, identified with the Jewish Bund, and rejected the Zionist standpoint for a long time.¹⁴ In this sense, he is one of the last inheritors of that powerful Jewish Eastern European worker’s movement that Lenin and Stalin feared, a movement swept aside by history and its communist and Hitlerian cataclysms. Practically wiped out in Eastern Europe, the Bund would scarcely survive in the United States, since “where there is no more Yiddish culture, or Jewish proletariat, or Jewish political activism, there can be no Bund.”¹⁵ Steeped as he was in a Jewish universe, Bell nonetheless, apart from a few brief texts where he presents himself as the advocate of a redemptive Messianism,¹⁶ constructed a body of work that is foreign to Judaism, as if involvement in sociology prevented participation in a collective social life, which little by little fades away. He became the theoretician of the end of ideologies, of industrial society and its cultural contradictions, which at length propels him to a professorship at Columbia and then at Harvard.

Daniel Bell and Claude Lévi-Strauss, worlds apart, nevertheless both illustrate an enigma: like a host of other sociologists, anthropologists, political analysts, and contemporary Jewish historians, in their body of work, they both completely abandoned the very fact of being Jewish. Observing society from outside, whether they were of privileged or humble social origins, immigrants or members of the second or third generation, sons of rabbis or assimilated parents, they almost always turned away from it, ignoring, too, the features of a uniquely Jewish historiography that has been in the process of elaboration since the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, to take stock of this tropism with respect to the social sciences, one can state, along with Jürgen Habermas, that “the Jews necessarily had to experience society as something one collides with, and this became so persistent with them that they possessed, so to speak from birth, the sociological outlook.”¹⁷ Alain Touraine also notes that “it is partly anti-Semitic rejection that made middle-class Jewish intellectuals feel sufficiently distanced from their society to be able to think about it. It is not by chance that sociology

in France has been almost completely Jewish—and in the United States too.”¹⁸ This state of affairs had already been observed at the turn of the century by Thorstein Veblen, the radical American sociologist of Norwegian origin who emphasized the Jews’ “preeminence” in intellectual life as a “hybrid” being, “foreign” to the social system with their dual (*hyphenated*) personality—all characteristics that encouraged them to observe things from a distance and that favored the sociological gaze.¹⁹

This undeniable quality is not unique to them. Thus Raymond Aron finds that “in the United States, there is a relatively high proportion of Jews and minorities among sociologists. . . . Minorities tend to be at once subjective and objective when they look at their political collectivity, the country or culture to which they belong.”²⁰ In the same sense, Claude Lévi-Strauss also writes:

I admit that in sociology and ethnology, there is a considerable proportion of Jews. Perhaps we need not attach any more importance to this than to the considerable proportion of hyphenated names among ethnologists, which has also been noted. It seems to me, though, that two types of explanations can be proposed. In the first place, the social promotion of the Jews, in the twentieth century, coincided with the formation of the social sciences as a full-fledged discipline. So there was a “niche” there—in the ecological sense of the word—that was partly vacant, and in which newcomers could establish themselves without confronting stiff competition. In the second place, one has to consider the psychological and moral effects of anti-Semitism, which I, like so many others, experienced intermittently from childhood on, at elementary school and then in high school. To discover oneself suddenly questioned by a community of which you thought you had been an integral part can lead a young mind to step back from social reality, forced as he is to consider it simultaneously from within, where he thinks he is, and from without, where they place him. But that is only one way among many others to learn how to situate oneself in a sociological or ethnological perspective.²¹

“From within, where he thinks he is, and from without, where they place him.” Never had the author of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* so admitted the peculiar origin of his sociological gaze; never had he so evoked that intimate feeling of having been, as a Jew, placed “outside” whereas he “felt he was totally and exclusively French,”²² he whose

family had been established in the Alsace for almost three centuries. This simultaneous position of “insider” and “outsider” is certainly not unique to the Jews, but it might also not be grasped as “one way among others” to situate oneself in a sociological perspective, as the theoreticians of contemporary multiculturalism in turn regard it, who trivialize the notion of diaspora and exile by comparing the fate of the Jews to that of so many other cultural and ethnic minorities, who also find themselves both inside and outside.²³

If likenesses stemming from similar statuses and positions clearly arise, it still remains true that in the present time the “niche” of the social sciences is more commonly occupied by Jews or intellectuals of Jewish origin who are perceived as such, whatever they might be, than by any other “minority.” Already at the end of the nineteenth century, Ludwig Gumplowicz in Poland and Georg Simmel in Germany illustrated this status of foreigner/sociologist. The former, who devoted his thesis to the history of Polish Jews, after being expelled from university explicitly called for the osmosis of Jews into the heart of the populations that welcomed them and regretted that the “decadent Jewish nationality that has for centuries devoured us like vampires, sucked our blood, and destroyed our vitality” didn’t disappear more quickly, before being converted to Protestantism.²⁴ Simmel, though, whose parents also had converted but who still had a brush with the anti-Semitic university, went on to privilege the position of the stranger.²⁵ During the same period, French-style republican meritocracy made university and research more accessible for Émile Durkheim and, after him, Robert Hertz, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and then Marcel Mauss, all of whom became renowned in this domain without, however, devoting any part of their scholarly work to the Jewish issue; Durkheim, moreover, didn’t hide the disdain he had for the old time “yüdisch” (*sic*), who turned their backs on modernity.²⁶ Finally, a little later on in Hungary, Georg Lukács and Karl Mannheim encountered Marxism and sociology but once again without retaining the slightest hint of their personal history in the development of their work; their dialogue with Martin Buber and the Hassidic world would be short-lived. Lukács writes, “I have always thought that I was Jewish but that has never had any influence whatsoever on my own thinking,”²⁷ whereas Mannheim “distances himself from Eastern Jews” and “feels no interest in Jewish

traditions.”²⁸ They too are caught up by the great assimilationist movement at work in all its forms in both Eastern and Western Europe, but which is revealed to have all the more resonance when it operates in the name of Reason through the intervention of the nation-state. By contrast, in the vast Russian empire and in the distant fringes of the Austro-Hungarian empire, as well as thereafter in the immense decentralized American space, memories live on more easily, in these fragmented worlds.

In the United States, the social sciences have long been dominated by Protestants such as Edward Ross and William Graham Sumner, or Charles Horton Cooley, Franklin Giddings, Talcott Parsons.²⁹ They all burst on the scene at the start of the Second World War, during which veritable troupes of social scientists immigrated, often assimilated German Jews fleeing Nazism; others during that time came, directly or indirectly, more from those regions of Eastern Europe that were the residential zones allocated to Jews long ago. During that same period, however, the most prestigious Ivy League universities remained almost closed to them, since anti-Semitism was so much in evidence and prevented their hiring. The context changed radically in the 1960s, when anti-Semitism lost all traces of legitimacy. Whereas no Jew had managed to become a professor at Yale by 1946, in 1970, 22 percent of the professors at that university were Jews.³⁰ A veritable “de-Christianization” of American culture followed,³¹ which increased the visibility of Jews in the heart of the most prestigious universities even more since, according to a report by the Carnegie Foundation (1969), Jews then comprised 17 percent of the professorial body of Ivy League universities, while it represented only 3 percent of the population.³² More specifically, 13 percent of sociology professors were Jews,³³ a fact that gives an entirely different dimension to the statements of Claude Lévi-Strauss or Raymond Aron, and that confirms the viewpoint of Jürgen Habermas as to the specificity of their presence in the various social sciences.

But that is not the main point. It is striking to note that despite their strong representation in these fields of research, rare indeed are the academic Jews who ventured to devote some of their work to the fact of being Jewish itself. In the United States as well as in Europe, there weren’t many people who took the risk of being perceived and condemned as Jews who cared only about egocentric ethnicity, thus

seeing themselves ever after inevitably relegated to the ghetto of “Jewish Studies,” far from the specific and noble field of general sociology.³⁴ Thus, even in the second half of the twentieth century, their strong presence in the social sciences, especially in the United States, had almost no repercussions on the legitimacy of Jewish studies. Sociology, political science, economy, or history simply seemed like different ways to gain fame, served as springboards for assimilation, facilitated entrance into general society depending on universalist viewpoints and positive methods or even methodological considerations centered on the subject that rightly avoided any excessively culturalist dimension. In a brief but brilliant and already dated article, Seymour Martin Lipset waxed ironic about the fact that “there are a lot of Jewish sociologists but few sociologists who study Jews. . . . Jewish academics would prefer to ignore Jews as an area of study since . . . for most of them, becoming sociologists or even anthropologists was a way to escape their Judaism, since the philosophical and methodological foundations of sociology were universalist rather than particularist . . . from then on, whoever studied the Jews risked being labeled a ‘Judaizing Jew.’”³⁵

When these specialists in the social sciences did encounter the question of ethnicity during the course of their careers, they almost always focused, for instance, on the future of African Americans, not of Jews, who were supposed to assimilate thoroughly into an open society. From many points of view, this interpretation, iconoclastic in terms of career and integration, but also in terms of self-effacement because of requirements for civility and respectability that imply a differentiation between one’s private values and one’s behavior suitable to a universalist public space where modernity reigns, has lost none of its pertinence, despite its provocative dimension. The universalist “code of civility,” which torments a number of Jewish sociologists, ethnologists, political scientists, and historians in their dealings with “gentiles”—as John Murray Cuddihy once noted in an essay that was as clumsy as it was brilliant, in which he maintained that “the emancipation of the Jews implies their clash with the process of differentiation of Western societies, a differentiation foreign to the subculture of the *shtetl* and the *yiddishkeit*”—could only divert them from the fact of being Jewish itself, whether because of a revolutionary choice of a Marxist kind or, on the contrary, of a search for principles that can ensure functional integration into the

heart of the existing social system.³⁶ Entrance into modernity seems to require a distancing, a standing apart from the Jewish milieu, all the more so since in the United States of that time, according to Simon Dubnow, “Yiddish, the vernacular, common to people who came from Russia, Poland, and Romania, naturally constituted the main factor of unity,”³⁷ as it had in the distant Eastern Europe from which they mostly came, without always having already taken the way of Western assimilation. Their entrance into sociology in the most prestigious institutions, like Chicago,³⁸ Columbia, and Harvard, where the code of civility reigned supreme through the predominance of the Parsonian model of differentiation,³⁹ is then conceived as a break with the world of uniquely Jewish identity, with a heavy past of isolation that it has become convenient to forget or reject in order to penetrate on the same level into a reconciled and functional society, or, in the academic community with its principles derived from the Enlightenment, definitively to espouse a vocation that will not tolerate the slightest particularist attachment, which would be considered anachronistic and alienating.⁴⁰

These days, the presence of Jews in the social sciences is undeniable, if more so in the United States than in Europe. In France, for instance, it is almost relegated to the past and is limited to scholars like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Raymond Aron, Georges Gurvitch, and Georges Friedmann,⁴¹ all of whom abstained, like a number of their American colleagues, from devoting any kind of systematic sociological study to the fact of being Jewish.⁴² In the United States and to an infinitely lesser degree in Great Britain, the list of such “social scientists” of renown is almost limitless. In ethnology, we find Franz Boas as well as his disciples Edward Sapir, Robert Lowie,⁴³ Abram Kardiner, and, in Great Britain, Max Gluckman. In sociology, the names abound: from Daniel Bell to Nathan Glazer, Reinhard Bendix, Lewis Coser, Louis Wirth, Alfred Schütz, Erving Goffman, Paul Lazarsfeld, Alvin Gouldner, Joseph Ben-David, Howard Becker, Eliot Freidson, Leon Festinger, Herbert Marcuse, Kurt Wolff, David Riesman, and also William Kornhauser, Herbert Blumer, Kurt Lewin, Erich Fromm, Lewis Feuer, Amitai Etzioni, and Albert Hirschman. Straddling economics as Hirschman does are Karl Polanyi and so many others,⁴⁴ as for example in Great Britain: Morris Ginsberg, Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, Karl Mannheim, Norbert Elias, Ernst Gellner.⁴⁵ In political sciences more generally, we can cite Leo Strauss,

Seymour Martin Lipset, Karl Deutsch, Leo Lowenthal, Hans Morgenthau, Aaron Wildavsky, Michael Walzer, Franz Neuman, Hannah Arendt, Otto Kirchheimer,⁴⁶ and, in Great Britain, Isaiah Berlin, Harold Laski, Samuel E. Finer, Elie Kedourie, and Hans Kohn.⁴⁷

These incomplete and disordered lists are full of every imaginable fault. Their usefulness seems doubtful, so deeply based are they in the most varied ways of apprehending an identity that cannot be seriously reified by a simple comparison of disparate names. Any list of names thus organized according to cultural adherence should be viewed with caution, since it artificially gathers together ethnologists, sociologists, and political theorists who have frequently opposed each other in the course of major controversies, since despite a shared cultural heritage they were inspired by conceptions of truth and visions of the world that are radically antagonistic to each other—that could in no way be inferred from one single historicity. Thus Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn, Morris Ginsberg and Karl Mannheim, Ernst Gellner and Hannah Arendt clashed strongly, just as theoreticians of symbolic action turned their backs on those who claimed to adhere to functionalism or Marxism. Similarly, we find in this Prévert-like list many scholars of developmentalism favorable to modernization conceived as a linear process productive of roles capable of limiting the amplitude of destructive internal conflicts: from Karl Deutsch to Marion Levy, from Daniel Lerner to David Apter, from Gabriel Almond to Irving Louis Horowitz, there are many here who offer a pacified vision of history. By contrast, others present themselves as convinced supporters of an approach based on the nature of conflict, confrontation, mobilization, or even revolution as normal—from Lewis Coser to Alvin Gouldner, Gary Marx, and Herbert Marcuse.⁴⁸ From many points of view, these lists are thus stripped of any reason for being.

Yet what holds the majority of these social scientists together, beyond their profound theoretical divergences but also their disparate life stories as well as their varying relationships to the Jewish tradition, is that almost none of them has devoted one single instant of his long professional life to applying his immense competence to the fact of being Jewish, no matter how this fact is regarded. Their attention is focused instead on studying social stratification, classes, or mobilization; they are concerned with the question of professions, the nature of interac-

tion in totalitarian institutions or in the heart of groups of deviants; at the core of their research they focus on the dimensions of nationalism, ideology, or development, or else on the nature of public politics, bureaucracies, authoritarianisms, electoral behavior, populism. In the favorable context of the second half of the twentieth century, a large number of Jews entered the social sciences, but, like Claude Lévi-Strauss or Daniel Bell, although so different from each other, they systematically neglected the anthropology, sociology, or political history of the Jewish societies of yesterday and today. Even more, from the numerous existing biographies or autobiographies, one could cite the declarations, often the harsh stances of these theoreticians of the social sciences who disclose their wish to do everything they can so as not to appear in the public arena as Jews.

We'll quickly give a few examples. Born in 1858 and raised in Germany in an assimilated Jewish family that had taken up the republican ideas of 1848, living in America in 1884, and having become in 1896 a professor at Columbia, Franz Boas, the master of anthropology, was the first to object, in 1908, to the arrival in the United States of immigrants who were "Hebrew Eastern Europeans," who had "a physical type distinct from that of northwestern Europe," and whose "norms were profoundly distinct from our own." Supporter of a cultural relativism that he sought to make compatible with the universalism of the Enlightenment, an admirer of the customs, traditions, and culture of the Eskimos and of the Indian tribes of British Columbia open to mixed-race marriages, Boas however predicted the disappearance of the Jews through assimilation. He won acclaim for anthropology and became president of the American Anthropological Association. Although he bore on his face the deep scars of the duels he fought in the anti-Semitic Germany of his youth, he deliberately retained none of his own past, although it too was charged with a unique culture—none, except for the rejection of the anti-Semitism he was publicly opposed to, since it prevented the inevitable assimilation he favored. Boas in fact devoted a short text to demonstrating the transformation of the shape of the head of "Hebrews" who adapted themselves to the American environment; in his opinion, "the dispersion of the Jews has considerably increased their mixture . . . their mental reactions correspond to those of the peoples among whom they live"; hence their rapid disappearance.⁴⁹

The same is true for Boas's student Robert Lowie, born in Vienna in 1883 to a Jewish family that was also assimilated. Having become a specialist in the Shoshone Indians, the Washos of Nevada, the Crows of Montana, the Hopis of Arizona, and the Chippewa of Northern Alberta, Lowie was henceforth vastly removed from the Jewish history that continued to unfold in his native Vienna under the iron rule of Karl Lueger. It was only in a few topical texts of a journalistic nature that he spoke of the anti-Semitism that was striking them, comparing it to the lynchings of black Americans.⁵⁰ When we know that Marcel Mauss constructed some of his work starting from the culture of the Maoris of the western Pacific, that Robert Hertz was inspired by the example of the tribes of Nigeria or by representations of primitive Christian societies,⁵¹ that Max Gluckman, founder in 1949 of the famous Anthropology department in Manchester, chose to work on the Zulus in South Africa,⁵² and that Claude Lévi-Strauss devoted a large part of his life to the Bororos or to the Nambikwaras, it does indeed seem as if anthropological procedure obeys a logic of distancing from and rupture with one's own culture, which has almost been abandoned. It is as if it were a matter of providing oneself with a new culture, at opposite extremes from an age-old history that seems to be coming to an end in Europe and in the United States, thanks to an assimilation that has become realizable. Some have thought that "dominant anthropology has scarcely tolerated studies in which a Jewish dimension is expressed; their authors were most often ghettoized and relegated to Jewish Studies. . . . Does anthropology have 'a Jewish problem'? . . . namely, that a number of American anthropologists come from Jewish families, but almost none of them has undertaken research concerning the Jews."⁵³

This remark remains true in many other areas of the social sciences. As with theories of modernization, does attraction to the most sophisticated scientific methods also express the possibility of a certain distancing, a protective neutralization through recourse to truly neutral, objective science, bearer of progress and unarguable knowledge? Thus Paul Lazarsfeld and Karl Deutsch each become prominent in his field through recourse to an extreme positivism. The former, born in 1901 to an assimilated Viennese Jewish family, emigrated to the United States in 1933, became a professor at Columbia in 1941, and became known as the methodologist par excellence in the social sciences. In a long auto-

biography, Lazarsfeld barely ever mentions the anti-Semitism rife in Austria, preferring instead to discuss his career, during which he never, in his numerous writings, discusses questions having to do with his origin—to the point that the contributions to the festschrift published in homage to him remain almost mute on this point.⁵⁴ In a little-known interview, however, he confided his feeling of having remained an “outsider” because of his “Jewish look” and his accent, and he adds, not without humor but faithful to his search for independent variables: “I wasn’t too affected by it, since my foreignness won out over my Jewish identity. I think I would have encountered even more difficulties as an American Jew than I did as an Austrian Jew. I think I would never have been appointed to Columbia at that time as an American Jew. No one saw me as a Jew, since I was above all a foreigner: my accent saved my life.”⁵⁵

Another example is that of Karl Deutsch, an author quoted 437 times in 1960 by the best specialists in international relations. He was born in 1912 to an assimilated Jewish family in Prague. His mother was the first woman to serve in the Czech Parliament. In 1938, Deutsch and his wife emigrated to the United States, where he became a professor at Harvard in 1967 and president of the American Association of Political Sciences. A supporter of behaviorist methods, his most famous work, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, was based on quantitative data, and later on Deutsch borrowed from cybernetics the concepts that allowed him to write *The Nerves of Government*. Inspired by modernizing perspectives favoring the construction of the nation and integration, his work doesn’t preserve any trace of his intellectual origin, which is not even mentioned, except in passing, as a simple piece of information, in works written in homage to him.⁵⁶

There are more examples. In the area of epistemology, we’ll cite Karl Popper, also profoundly assimilated, who in 1969 declares, “No, I am of Jewish origin but . . . I hate all kinds of racism and nationalism. . . . I have never professed Jewish faith. I see no reason to think of myself as Jewish,” and he adds soon afterward, “I do not consider myself an assimilated German Jew. It’s the Führer who saw me that way.”⁵⁷ And his rival Thomas Kuhn declares in his autobiography, in describing his American childhood, “You have to remember that we formed a Jewish family—not very Jewish, but we were all genuine Jews. Non-practicing Jews. . . . So it wasn’t an important question.”⁵⁸ Though

Popper and Kuhn furiously debate the question of truth and relativism, they nonetheless agree with each other in not approaching as Jews these questions of the epistemology of sciences, to minimize the weight of their past as much as possible. Popper was born in Vienna, like Paul Lazarsfeld whom he met at that time, as well as Karl Polanyi,⁵⁹ all three active in socialist milieus. His parents were married in the main synagogue of the city before they converted to Lutheranism. Excluded from one school because of the prevalent anti-Semitism, Popper pursued his father's assimilationist aims, thinking that "assimilation works: racial pride is both stupid and dangerous, since it provokes racial hatred."⁶⁰ Anxious to distance himself from this "racial pride" that according to him too many Jews propagate who refuse "to mingle with the populace,"⁶¹ he married a Catholic woman, and this "determined defender of Enlightenment" came to write that "the Torah is the source of religious intolerance and tribal nationalism," and also confessed that Zionism "makes him ashamed of his origins."⁶²

This thorough distancing is expressed by so many renowned specialists in the social sciences that it almost becomes a leitmotif. Thus, Reinhard Bendix, author of studies on Max Weber, bureaucracy, and the construction of the state, thinks of himself, according to the image of Robert Park that he quotes, as a "marginal man" in the process of voluntary assimilation. His grandfather was a teacher of Hebrew in a village near Dortmund and respected all traditions. His father, however, decided to break completely with Judaism and to identify with Germany alone: although he married a Jewish woman, he took up a career as a magistrate, assimilating with German society, refusing all links with Orthodox Jews, since, as he himself writes, "we did not feel at all like assimilated Jews, but rather like Germans identical to other Germans."⁶³ Arrested in 1933, he was imprisoned in Dachau for almost two years before he emigrated with his wife first to Palestine and then to the United States, where in 1946 they joined their son Reinhard (born in 1916), who had left for America in 1939. Reinhard thought of himself "as a political refugee, not as a Jew,"⁶⁴ even if in 1941 he had to go to the German embassy to renew his passport on which an official stamped a capital J, finding himself thus stigmatized as a Jew in the eyes of the Germans but also as a German enemy in the eyes of the Americans.⁶⁵ A student of Louis Wirth, Reinhard Bendix became a professor at the Uni-

versity of Chicago, where he found other colleagues, like Edward Shils, Daniel Bell, or David Riesman, who shared a similar background. “For me,” he writes, “the link between Ancient Israel and the modern world was broken, and I cannot be a part of the covenant with God . . . if I feel an affinity for the Jewish tradition, it is by sharing its attention to the sick, its respect for life as something precious . . . but its precepts can be found in many religions. They don’t allow me to lessen my feeling of being at the margins of the Jewish tradition . . . only exogamic marriage is a small step towards friendship, reconciliation.”⁶⁶ Here again, in two generations, a link with the past is broken with these profoundly assimilated academics who were German or Austrian.

How many more biographies should we discuss to measure the distance there is for so many renowned specialists in the social scientists with respect to their own past? When David Riesman, author of the classic book *The Lonely Crowd*, died early in 2002, his picture was on the front page of the *Times*, and the *New York Times* wrote about the death “of the last of the sociologists . . . whose work had the greatest influence on the nation.”⁶⁷ In reading his autobiography, we learn that, born in 1909 in a wealthy neighborhood in Philadelphia, after his father had emigrated from Germany, he thought of himself “as Jewish by birth but not by religion . . . there was neither a religious feeling nor an ethnic feeling in my family.” As a devoted sociologist, Riesman studied the nature of crowds and examined the consequences of individualism. Having become a professor at Harvard, he was not on the margins of the Jewish world like Bendix; instead, he had become completely foreign to it, to the point where he converted and joined the Unitarian religion of his wife.⁶⁸ Harold Laski, for his part, bluntly declares, “I am English, not Polish; agnostic, not Jewish; I cannot reconcile Maimonides with Mill.”⁶⁹ In few words, it’s all said. His parents, Orthodox Polish Jews very active in the Jewish milieu of Manchester, broke with him: “You are no longer my son,” his father said to him when the young Harold married a woman who wasn’t Jewish. Having become a socialist, Laski published famous books like *The Grammar of Politics*, *Parliamentary Government in England*, and *The American Presidency*, but despite reconciliation with his family and positions that were hostile to anti-Semitism and favorable to Israel, his scholarly work too was not concerned with the fact of being Jewish.

The conclusion is obvious. Not just the few authors we've just briefly mentioned, but so many others, like Alfred Schütz or Albert Hirschman, Erving Goffman or Howard Becker, Philip Selznick, Alvin Gouldner, Norbert Elias or Karl Mannheim, do not take into account in their work the history they share beyond the dissimilarities, the nature of the specific social facts of which they are the heirs and continuators in new contexts, albeit in different ways. Thus, using his famous typology, Albert Hirschman could have included the classic example of the Jews to discuss the strategies of defecting, of speaking out, or of loyalty, all the more so since he himself "defected" from Hitler's Germany. Moreover, when he focuses on reactionary rhetoric, he could have encountered the question of anti-Semitism that is frequently substantial with it, including in the work of a number of authors he discusses.⁷⁰ Likewise, when, in pages that have become famous, Alfred Schütz examines marginal figures and the figure of the *homecomer*, he takes care not to discuss examples drawn from a history that is nonetheless familiar to him,⁷¹ like Erving Goffman who only occasionally mentions Jewish examples to support his reflections on the presentation of self. Howard Becker, whose family is originally from Lithuania, works only on jazz or marijuana smokers since, in his eyes, the "outsider" is not connected to a determined historical or social situation; deviance results solely from an interaction between individuals—it's a process whereby an individual is labeled as an outsider, but the outsider can then think that "judges are foreign to his universe." This means that we are far from a historically constructed and less malleable situation where the Jews, for instance, symbolize the foreigner or outsider par excellence, from Georg Simmel's point of view, a historical context that Howard Becker does not remember, even though he studied at Chicago where his direct forebears taught.⁷² In the same sense, among all the urban sociologists of the Second Chicago School, many of whom were Jewish, only Herbert Gans, who was born in Cologne and who emigrated to the United States in 1937, dared to take an interest in the world of the Jewish suburbs by calling into question the shortcomings of many of the dominant approaches that were purely assimilationist.⁷³

Finally, an author like Norbert Elias, who received a minimal religious education and who, in his youth, was active for many years in the heart of Zionist organizations of a nationalist rather than socialist inspiration,

till he became, as he neared thirty, one of the leaders of a particularly active little group,⁷⁴ could also have encountered, for instance, Jews in the king's court, or else the question of fiscal politics waged by the kings of France against the Jews when he was studying the society of the court and the construction of the state, or might have noticed anti-Semitism and the pogroms when he was developing his thesis on the supposed decline of violence. But that was not at all the case, and when he discusses the Shoah much later on, it is only to emphasize that in his opinion it does not call into question his general theory that civility is increasing.⁷⁵ Jewish history actually has almost no place in this historian of modernism from a Jewish background in Breslau (Wrocław) who fled Germany in 1933 but who, aside from a brief text of autobiographical nature written later on, never, as a sociologist or as a theoretician, dealt with this specific aspect of contemporary civilization, even when he wrote an entire book about the Germans. Although, after many other books, he considered that "it is very probable that the experiences he himself had as a Jew, in Germany, from early childhood on, contributed to increasing the attraction he felt later on for sociology," since he had to "distance himself from the dominant society" so much,⁷⁶ he was certain that his reputation would probably not have been so exalted if he had remained faithful only to the concerns of his youth in the choice of his subjects for study, even if he had managed to show the same inventiveness.⁷⁷

The observation remains irrevocable: in all the disciplines of the social sciences, almost all Jews are shown to be careful in the exercise of their profession and in all the themes used for their research to limit the weight of their own past and to adopt a stance that does not place them "outside" society. This observation can also obviously be applied a fortiori to the historians who, for instance, devote their studies to the distant Middle Ages. From Marc Bloch to Ernst Kantorowicz, from republican patriotism leading to the Resistance or, at the opposite extreme, the most radical nationalism that is assumed for integration in the Frankish groups—here it is integration in the republican body that is emphasized, or, conversely, in an organic and *volkisch* kind of nation. One can in no way compare the separate fates of these two outstanding historians whose ideals are radically antithetical—except in their similar desire to refuse categorically the logic of exclusion that is imposed on them.