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James Cohen
Université de Paris VIII, France, jim.cohen@libertysurf.fr

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The Accusation of Anti-Semitism as Moral Blackmail

Conservative Jews in France and the Israel-Palestinian Conflict

James Cohen

Université de Paris VIII, France

jim.cohen@libertysurf.fr

Abstract: The topic examined in this article is not anti-semitism in itself, as illustrated by those who engage in it, but anti-semitism as brandished as a charge against real or alleged offenders. This approach is indispensable, the author argues, for a fuller understanding of how the notion of anti-semitism operates in political discourse and action. The author speaks in particular of the accusation of anti-semitism in cases where it can be shown that the behavior targeted is at least in part, and sometimes in great part, *imaginary* and *constructed*. The effectiveness of this *ascribed* anti-semitism depends on the capacity of those who construct it (precisely in order to denounce it) to make it *appear* plausible by connecting it, however indirectly, with tangible anti-semitic acts or declarations. The author explores a few cases from recent French experience in which the connection between what is denounced as anti-semitic discourse or activity and what has actually occurred is often tenuous, overblown, or, at the least, highly debatable. In such cases anti-semitism is constructed in an essentializing and a-historical manner, in such a way as to lump together disparate groups and individuals into a supposed current or milieu or nebula, portrayed in conspiratorial terms.

The topic I wish to examine here is not anti-semitism in itself, as illustrated by those who engage in it, but anti-semitism as brandished as a charge against real or alleged offenders. This approach is indispensable, I would argue, for a fuller understanding of how the notion of anti-semitism operates in political discourse and action.

I want to speak in particular of the accusation of anti-semitism in cases where it can be shown that the behavior targeted is at least in part, and sometimes in great part, *imaginary* and *constructed*. The effectiveness of this *ascribed* anti-semitism depends, as we shall see, on the capacity of those who construct it (precisely in order to denounce it) to make it *appear* plausible by connecting it, however indirectly, with tangible anti-semitic acts or declarations. I will explore a few cases from recent French experience in which the connection between what is denounced as anti-semitic discourse or activity and what has actually occurred is often tenuous, overblown, or, at the least, highly debatable. In such cases anti-semitism is constructed in an essentializing and a-historical manner, in such a way as to lump together disparate groups and individuals into a supposed current or milieu or nebula, portrayed in conspiratorial terms.

James Cohen is an associate professor (maître de conférences) in the Department of Political Science at Université de Paris VIII, Saint-Denis, France. He is also Lecturer at the Institut des Hautes études de l'Amérique Latine, Paris, and member of the editorial committee of *Mouvements*.

ISRAEL RIGHT OR WRONG, IN THE NAME OF THE JEWS

The particular sort of essentialization at work here combines ethnicity, religion *and* politics (national and international) because it invokes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to create, or to radicalize, an effect of polarization within France by postulating an opposition between "the Jews" *as such* (for whom the accusers claim to speak) and all those who express an opposition to Israeli policies and are accused as a result of being anti-semites or, at the least, highly suspect tolerators of anti-semitism.

In its most elaborate and strategically mediated forms, this kind of discourse smacks of clash-of-civilizations reasoning because it is calculated to stir up suspicion with ethno-national and ethno-religious connotations and thereby to subsume under ethnic and religious categories a conflict whose material coordinates have much more to do, I would argue, with control over land, water and other resources than with identity issues alone. It presents itself as the authorized discourse for an entire community, wilfully ignoring the enormous diversity in the degree and character of ethnic, religious and political affiliation among those who define themselves, in one way or another, as Jews. Thus it is also a discourse of power, which instrumentalizes the notion of community belonging in order to assert the authority of those who claim to speak in the name of the entire Jewish "community."

The discourse I am describing stigmatizes anti-semitism, not in its usual historical forms in France, but rather as it is *supposedly* embodied by a broad spectrum of groups and individuals whose common characteristic is their opposition to Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. Some of these groups and individuals identify themselves as "anti-Zionists," others do not (I will leave aside the always vexed discussion on this issue). All are presented, whatever their differences, as working together: Arabs and Muslims suspected rightly or wrongly of being tempted by a violent brand of politicized Islam; ordinary Arabs and Muslims who are said to be potential victims of this "virus" and in danger of mutating into a new kind of anti-semite referred to as "Judeophobic"[1]; but also, and crucially, lumped together under the same heading: left-wing groups and intellectuals, anti-imperialist and antiwar groups, Palestinian solidarity groups, as well as global justice groups who are said to have been seduced by the sirens of extremist political Islam and who seek the destruction of Israel. All of the above are said to be contributing, together, to a rising tide of anti-semitism in France—sometimes compared with the rise of Nazism in Europe in the 1930s.

For outside observers it may be surprising to learn that those who propagate such discourses are not usually thought of as extremists. The discourse does not come from the ultra-right Jewish / Zionist nationalist circles (such as the *Ligue de défense juive* or *Bétar*), that is, unconditional and intransigent partisans of Israel who sometimes resort to street violence. One of the major sources of the form of discourse described above is a prestigious representative body of Jewish organizations known as the CRIF (*Conseil representatif des institutions juives de France*), whose former president, Roger Cukierman (2001-2007), referred during his mandate, in several highly remarked speeches and declarations, to what he called the "brown-green-red alliance"—in other words, a supposed grouping together of fascists, Muslims and leftists (who make up a bloc he describes as "far left, anti-globalization, anticapitalist, anti-American and anti-Zionist").

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[1] This term was proposed by Pierre-André Taguieff in *La nouvelle judéophobie*, 2002, Fayard, 2002.

The CRIF is not a lobbying organization in the special sense that applies in the U.S. political system—there are no strictly comparable entities in France—but in recent years this body has sought, with some success, to enhance its public visibility and become a broker of political influence and a pronounced tendency to combine domestic Jewish issues with the question of Israel/Palestine. Over the past several years, the CRIF's annual gala dinner has become an event "not to be missed" by high officials of the Socialist Party and Sarkozy's UMP [Union for a Popular Movement] party as well as important government ministers. Such figures make sure their presence at this dinner is noted by the press and television, and those who do *not* attend the event may be judged harshly. It is for this annual event that Cukierman has reserved some of his most audacious declarations, such as the denunciation of the "brown-green-red alliance" (January 27, 2003).

Cukierman came to be known for his particularly inept—or deliberately provocative—use of words (he was succeeded in 2007 by someone equally conservative but more urbane and moderate in tone). In his years as president he found many opportunities to express his ultraconservative and particularly Manichean world-view. In September 2001, in a famous declaration to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, he stated that he had suggested to Ariel Sharon that Israel, in order to defend its image in the world, "should absolutely open a ministry of propaganda, like Goebbels." On April 23, 2002, just after Jean-Marie Le Pen had survived to the second round of balloting in the presidential election with nearly 17%, outscoring the Socialist candidate, Cukierman declared, also to *Ha'aretz*: "The success of Le Pen is a message to Muslims to behave well, to settle down…"

This instrumental use of the charge of anti-semitism in order to bash and discredit certain designated adversaries is an example of what is referred to in French as *chantage*, which literally means blackmail, in the sense of moral blackmail. In 2003 the Editions La Découverte published a collection of essays under the title *Antisémitisme: l'intolérable chantage. Israël Palestine, une affaire française?* [Anti-semitism, the intolerable blackmail. Israel, Palestine: a French affair?] that contains contributions by philosophers Etienne Balibar and Judith Butler, human rights activist Rony Brauman, Franco-Israeli peace activist Michel Warschawski and several other figures, all but one being Jews who disagree with what is said and done in their name by the so-called representative bodies. All the authors denounce in one way or another the technique of branding people as anti-semites whenever they manifest public opposition to Israeli policies in the occupied territories or advocate decolonization and Palestinian self-determination.

A BRIEF FRANCE-U.S. COMPARISON

By comparison, it might be said that the political context of recourse to such moral blackmail looks somewhat simpler in the United States. Clearly enough, when Judith Butler criticized former Harvard president Larry Summers in 2003 for stigmatizing as anti-semites those intellectuals who organize in universities to oppose the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, she was referring to the elementary procedure of linking Judaism and world Jewry with Israel in one tight, essentialized bundle[2]—a very similar procedure to what I am describing here for France. However, when such things happen in the U.S., nobody in conservative elite pro-Israeli circles is really worried that U.S. policy will thereby be affected or that significant numbers of people in Congress might start openly questioning the right of Israel's leaders to do whatever they please. The Republicans and the Dem-

[2] Judith Butler, "No, It's Not Anti-Semitic," *London Review of Books*, August 21, 2003.

ocrats are watched over by the Israel lobby (AIPAC in particular) and sectors of the Christian right, lest they should start to "deviate" toward positions considered unacceptable. Intellectuals such as Judith Butler (and a few hundred others) can always protest, and often do, but they do not usually have much effect on national politics. (It remains to be seen whether the recent book by ex-president Jimmy Carter[3] will help to challenge in a practical way the taboo against criticizing Israeli policy, just as it remains to be seen whether the Mearsheimer and Walt article, followed by a book on the lobby will help to create more space for debate about alternative policies for Middle East.[4])

In France the context is significantly different for two reasons. First, this will not change the fact that France is a country where common-sense thinking for a long time, among citizens across the political spectrum, has been that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be settled equitably, with an historic compromise—and that Israel's policies are often too intransigent to allow for much progress in that direction, which is not to say that the Palestinians are absolutely pure, because it is well-known that there is widespread corruption among sectors of the leadership. This is in a nutshell the local common sense, and if you compare it to the United States it looks more balanced. In such an atmosphere, the interpretation of conservative Jewish leaders, according to which the government and the media are *"pro-Arab"* and tend systematically to denigrate Israel, looks curiously tendentious. Although the new Sarkozy presidency could over time end up changing the center of gravity of public opinion in this area, it will be much harder to change prevailing common sense among political elites and high-ranking military officers.

The second major difference is that in the United States, Arabs and Muslims are all made invisible politically, which is clearly not the case for Jews nor for the unconditional supporters of Israel. In the French case what lends more spice and more sociological complexity to the procedure of labelling all opposition to Israeli policies as "anti-semitic" is the fact that France is the country in Western Europe with both the largest Jewish population (approximately 600,000) and the largest Arab-Muslim population (an estimated 5 million). French Jews are partly of European heritage (about 30%) and in their majority "Sephardic" (about 70%), that is, products of the former North African colonies, in particular Algeria. These Jews were not treated as ordinary colonial subjects because they were granted French citizenship in 1871 while all the rest of the indigenous population, categorized officially as Muslims, was denied it. In other words, North African Jews, in a classic imperial divide-and-rule strategy, were given privileged treatment which removed them from the status of ordinary colonial subjects. One of the implications of this singular French history is that those who claim to speak in the name of French Jewry in denouncing criticisms of Israel must work harder and give more of an appearance of sociological thickness to their construction, turning it into a highly elaborate ideological montage. In order to achieve the degree of polarization they aim for, they cannot simply isolate pro-Palestinian intellectuals and activists as is possible in the U.S. where they are cast in the role of "the usual suspects."

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[3] Jimmy Carter, *Palestine. Peace Not Apartheid*, Simon & Schuster, 2006.

[4] John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007. This is not the place to pursue the debate about the specific weight of the lobby in the U.S. foreign policy process involving Noam Chomsky, Jeffrey Blankfort and others. For what strikes me as a balanced and reasonable account of the emerging debate, see Mitchell Plitnick and Chris Toensing, "Putting the Israel Lobby in Perspective," *Middle East Report Online*, posted on Alternet.org, October 31, 2007.

They must also claim some sort of link between these intellectuals and activists and certain Muslim activists designated as suspect, ordinary Arabs and Muslims seen as potential recruits for militant anti-semitism, *and* the more familiar historical type of white European anti-semites and holocaust deniers.

In this type of construction, anti-semitism must be painted as a broad societal problem, a spreading plague, via an elaborate set of associations and complicities that draws together a wide spectrum of real or potential anti-semites and presents them as all in cahoots. It is all very contrived and highly implausible when one looks closely, but it can appear plausible to those inclined to accept conspiratorial accounts of reality or others who are simply inclined to believe the people who claim to speak in the name of the Jewish community.

However contrived and implausible the discourse, it is of course contrived for a reason. Those who spin such tales have to present this "new" anti-semitism as part of a *rising tide* that, if it continued unchecked, could engulf French society. They are tempted to draw parallels with the 1930s, and the rise of Nazism in Germany—parallels which are lacking in credibility for anyone who actually lives in France, but which do sell well abroad—particularly in the U.S.—and indeed this is one of its crucial functions.[5] This kind of fable goes over well among impressionable Jewish publics in the United States, and among those conservative / neoconservative currents of all origins who see it as their duty to fight to change France's *supposedly* hostile policy toward Israel and its *supposedly* "anti-American" attitude toward U.S. foreign policy in the Mideast. (Actually this policy has not been so terribly hostile to U.S. or Israeli interests over the years, but to go into detail on this would call for a separate discussion.)

In July 2004 Ariel Sharon found this highly polarized portrait of France so convincing or so congenial to his interests that he invoked it against former president Jacques Chirac, issuing a call for French Jews to migrate massively to Israel "as soon as possible."[6] This of course did not happen, although departures to Israel did go up slightly for a brief period. Not only did the French foreign ministry protest this declaration, but even a CRIF spokesperson declared that Sharon's outburst was an "unacceptable" and only "threw oil onto the fire."[7]

REAL ANTI-SEMITISM

What is the relationship between the political rhetoric described here and actual anti-semitic behavior here in France—the kind that really does result in hate speech, discrimination and the threat of violence? Undeniably there was a sharp rise in the frequency of anti-semitic threats and acts in the wake of the second Palestinian Intifada in September-October 2000, including attacks against individuals, graffiti on synagogue walls, a few fire-bombings, a few desecrations of cemeteries. There was another sharp jump in April 2002, which corresponded clearly to the Israeli military sweep through the West Bank.[8] All such incidents are shocking and reprehensible, and they are promptly denounced by pub-

[5] A strong argument is made on this point by Tony Judt in "Goodbye to All That? The Anti-Semitism of Today's Europe is Not That of Our Grandfathers' Generation," *The Nation*, January 3, 2005. Relevant documentation may also be found in Mearsheimer and Walt, *op. cit*., p. 192-196.

[6] See Valérie Gas, "Sharon provoque l'indignation," *RFI Actualité*, 19 juillet 2004: http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/055/article_29360.asp

[7] Ibid.

[8] Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaïsse, *Intégrer l'Islam. La France et ses musulmans. Enjeux et réussites*, trad., Odile Jacob, 2006, chapter 9 ("L'Antisémitisme chez les musulmans"), p. 271-296.

lic authorities and by a wide range of organizations. However, if one looks at the matter with the detachment that statistics allows, it is clear enough that the upward curve of such incidents lasted from 2000 to 2002, after which it reached a plateau at a slightly higher level than prior to 2000.

My point is not to dwell on figures because even a handful of such incidents are a source of worry. The point is rather to emphasize that contrary to what the "brown-green-red alliance" thesis claims; there is virtually no one on the radical left, and no one who identifies with the Palestinian cause, who takes pleasure in anti-semitic acts. No one interprets the painting of anti-semitic slogans on schools or the firebombing of synagogues as blows struck for Palestinian self-determination or signs of an emerging anti-imperialist consciousness. Above all, it is quite exaggerated to portray these sorts of acts as the sign of an emerging mass anti-semitism among Muslims. Serious studies indicate that there may be slightly higher rates of intolerance toward Jews—at least as measured in surveys—among the descendants of recent immigrants than in the rest of the population, but this constitutes by no means a majority of Muslims and certainly nothing like a rising tide that is engulfing French society.[9]

The notion of "the new Judeophobia" as promoted by Pierre-André Taguieff does not add anything new to our understanding of how anti-semitism works in French society. Instead the term functions as a code-word for the lumping together of many disparate parties as accomplices to the same crime. It's an openly ideological notion, with a polarizing and stigmatizing effect, and cannot be taken at face value. Here is how a journalist of *L'Express* presented the notion in a short review of Taguieff's book just after it was released 2002: "*La nouvelle judéophobie* [title of the book] problematizes the anti-semitic wave that is without precedent since the Nazi era, and born of the demonization of Israel, and promoted all over the world by a coalition of hatred in which crazy Islamists (Bin Laden) mingle with recycled anti-imperialists (Garaudy), and 'orphans of the revolution' (Carlos)."[10] *L'Express* is reputed to be a serious weekly magazine of news and commentary, but the passage quoted is a case study in rumor, innuendo and guilt by amalgamation.

IDEAL SCAPEGOATS

In a more detailed study of this phenomenon, we would need to look at the roles assigned to certain public actors who have been designated as privileged targets for vilification in the ongoing attempt to demonstrate a supposed organic link between anti-semitism, Islam and the left. Such has been the fate of Islamic theologian and activist Tariq Ramadan, who has been repeatedly branded a "fundamentalist" without any clear demonstration that this is the case, and as an anti-semite, an accusation which is in part corroborated by one declaration made in October 2003 to the effect that certain French Jewish intellectuals—this is a close paraphrase of his remark—were beginning to analyze the world less from a universal point of view than from a community outlook.[11] Although in a sense Ramadan was only say-

[9] See Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj, *Français comme les autres ? Enquête sur les citoyens d'origine magrhébine*, africaine et turque, Sciences Po, 2005, chapter 5, p. 95-108.

[10] See Daniel Rondeau, "Coalitions postnazies ", *L'Express* "Livres," January 24, 2002: http://livres.lexpress.fr/critique.asp?idC=3493&idR=12&idTC=3&idG=8.

[11] "Critique des (nouveaux) intellectuels communautaires" was published on the websites of oumma.com and the European Social Forum. For basic information on the incident see "Polémique autour d'un nouvel anti-sémitisme. Tariq Ramadan accusé d'antisémitisme après une tribune sur les 'intellectuels communautaires,'" posted on the website of the Atelier des Droits de l'Homme: http://www.aidh.org/dial_rel/tr.htm.

ing what others had noticed about the authors he named (one of whom was in fact not Jewish), and that Jewish critics have said similar things with impunity, his polemical tactics were no doubt maladroit (which is not usually his case). The incident was made to sound more serious because of the accompanying and omnipresent assertion that Ramadan is a "fundamentalist." True, he descends from an Egyptian family closely associated with the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in that country, and true, he has a brother whose positions are markedly more fundamentalist and authoritarian than his own. Ramadan himself is in favor of building community ties among Muslims throughout Europe and some ardent defenders of the French republican norms of citizenship who are simply Islamophobic may be shocked by the very notion; but this is no proof that he has anything like a fundamentalist political and religious agenda, nor that his conception of community building is in conflict with liberal democratic values and a cosmopolitan outlook. Nonetheless, he has been so branded and for the pro-Israeli right he is indeed a useful demon—the very symbol of how the far left and the global justice left have supposedly joined forces in their struggle against "Zionism" (and thus against Israel and thus against the Jews). It is true that some sectors of the far left and global justice left have entertained occasional dialogue with Ramadan, and taken a great deal of heat for it. Ramadan himself claims to take a great interest in the emerging global justice movement and there is no apparent reason to disbelieve the sincerity of this interest.

We could further examine the activity of a handful of French "negationists" (or "revisionists" or holocaust deniers), such as former communist philosopher Roger Garaudy and former Cuban studies scholar Maria Poumier, and their efforts to infiltrate the Palestinian movement, never with much success,[12] but with *just enough* success to give the conservative Jewish leaders something to talk about and to provide fodder for their amalgamating accusations—if one ignores the fact that most people in France who speak up for Palestinian self-determination have nothing whatsoever to do with anti-semitism and that a significant number of them are of Jewish origin themselves. Another figure with important scapegoat status is[13] the comic Dieudonné Mbala Mbala, Camerounese on his father's side, who has gone out on a limb several times with transgressive comments designed to place him squarely in the danger zone where criticism of Israel spills over into anti-semitism. The story began with a televised sketch on December 13, 2003, in which he disguised as an ultra-religious Jew and ironically encouraged the youth of the housing projects to join the "axis of good," the "Americano-Zionist axis." He reached his lowest point at a press conference in Algiers on February 16, 2005, when he denounced the memory of the holocaust as "*pornographie mémorielle*," or pornography of the historical memory. These declarations were made out of conviction but were also designed, it could be argued, to attract attention to Dieudonné himself and enhance his notoriety as an actor. A small radical fraction of the Palestinian solidarity movement—a group known as the CAPJPO (*Coordination des appels pour une paix juste au Proche-Orient*)—at one point took Dieudonné on board as a supposedly misunderstood champion of the Palestinian cause and installed him as a candidate on a (marginal) list of parliamentary candidates known as "EuroPalestine." This made him a very useful scapegoat indeed, since aiming at him resulted in striking a blow

[12] Basic facts of the Dieudonné case may be found on the website of Fil Info-France: http://www.fil-info-france.com/actualites-monde/dieudonne.htm.

[13] See Smahane Bouyahia, "La nouvelle affaire Dieudonné. L'humoriste français dérape à Algers," *afrik.com*, February 21, 2005 (see http://www.afrik.com/article8139.html).

against the Palestinian solidarity movement. But the CAPJPO had to take its distance from Dieudonné when he began consorting with other, already isolated figures such as Ginette Skandrani, who was a member of the Greens known for her wilful mixing together of criticism of Israeli policy and anti-semitism. (She has since been expelled from the Greens.)

CRITICAL RESPONSES

As the publication of *L'Antisémitism: l'intolérable chantage*, mentioned above, demonstrates, there are some significant critical responses (or antidotes) to the discourse lumping together all critics of Israel and calling them anti-semites. France continues to be a place where encounters between Arabs and Jews over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are possible, and although they do not happen frequently, when they do occur it is always under peaceful, and sometimes very fraternal circumstances. The Palestinians who edit the French version of the *Journal of Palestine Studies—Revue d'études palestiniennes*—are cosmopolitan intellectuals whom no one could seriously suspect of anti-semitism. The figure of Elias Sanbar—poet, historian, essayist and generally well-admired figure—is exemplary in this respect. Some highly reputed Jewish intellectuals are frequent contributors to the journal.

There are also some Jewish activists who reach out in an organized fashion to promote a critical vision of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One such group is known as the *Union juive française pour la paix* (UJFP, Union of French Jews for Peace). The group's mission statement, available on line, reads in part: "The UJFP dissociates itself from the Jewish institutions of France, in particular the CRIF and the *Consistoire israélite*, which identify totally with the Israeli government and its repressive policy toward the Palestinians. We seek to contribute to the creation of a different Jewish voice, secular (*laïque*) and progressive, by opposing the colonial policy of the Israeli authorities. We work for the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state next to Israel in the territories occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem as the binational capital of the two states. We support Israeli pacifists and our partners in dialogue in Palestinian society who work for a political settlement of the conflict. Here in France we work with partners—also secular and progressive—in the Arab community, first against all forms of racism and anti-semitism, and then to call together on the French and European authorities to intervene in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in favor of a just peace."[14]

A few remarkable initiatives have been taken to challenge mainstream opinion and stereotyped visions of how "Arabs" or "Muslims" and "Jews" are supposed to think. For two and a half years, from 2003 to 2005, Leila Shahid, then the spokesperson in France for the Palestinian Authority (she now serves in Brussels), teamed up with Michel Warschawski, a veteran Franco-Israeli peace activist, and Dominique Vidal, a journalist for *Le Monde Diplomatique*, to make a tour of several French cities.[15] They made it a point to go beyond meeting the handful of local activists in each place who agreed with them already and instead reached out to high-school-age youth in the urban areas outside city centers where many people of modest socioeconomic condition live, including many immigrants and their children. Their mission was to explain the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a *political* conflict rather than a religious or ethnic one, and to bring to these

[14] See the UJFP's website: http://www.ujfp.org/. The passage quoted here may be found under the heading "Notre engagement" [Our commitment].

[15] The three recount this mission in *Les banlieues, le Proche-Oirent et nous*, Editions de l'Atelier, 2006.

youth the living proof that Palestinians and Israelis and peace-minded French people can sit down, discuss the conflict calmly, and even forge a common vision of a future just peace. The very idea of having a cross-ethnic, cross-religious, secular and internationalist dialogue among citizens of various origins was new to many youth and left a strong mark wherever this trio managed to travel.

A well-known historian of French Jewry, Esther Benbassa, of Turkish origin, has made a different contribution but attempting, not without courage, to draw attention to what she sees as a marked tendency toward the withdrawal of the Jewish community from mainstream French society in recent years, into what she calls a community fishbowl (*aquarium*). She writes: "They listen to Jewish radio, read the Jewish press, live with Jews, go see Jewish films, etc.," adding that she is not referring here to the self-enclosed world of orthodox Jews, but to the others. Among community-oriented Jews, the conservative leadership has succeeded in increasing the degree of withdrawal because people, she says, are encouraged to reason roughly as follows: "We have been betrayed, the media are against us, French policy is against Israel and anti-semitism is rising up out of its ashes."[16]

At the same time, she points out, the idea of a unified Jewish "identity bloc" is clearly a myth because there are many French Jews, religiously observant or otherwise, who do not see themselves as represented by the CRIF or by any other community body and who do not see Israel as benefiting from some sacred immunity to international law. It is impossible to say how many non-community Jews or what percentage of the Jewish population they represent, but it is probably substantial. Benbassa calls attention to the fact that "during the second Intifada, a number of 'Jewish' petitions circulated and were published and they did not necessarily converge with the official discourse of Jewish institutions, which they vigorously contest."[17]

TOWARD A COUNTER-ANALYSIS

Finally—last but certainly not least—there is an intellectual in a category by himself: a sociologist, an elder statesman among intellectuals, and a very tough-minded apostate from the Jewish community, Edgar Morin. An op-ed text he signed in 2002 along with two other authors, Sami Naïr and Danièle Sallenave, comparing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a cancer, was accused by conservative and unconditionally pro-Israeli Jews as being anti-Zionist and anti-semitic all at once.[18] The three authors were brought to trial by several Jewish community organizations for supposed hate speech, but the real difficulty conservative Jewish leaders had with the text was that it was a political analysis of the conflict which made none of the usual concessions to polite discourse about Israel as an exemplary democracy and the like. On the contrary, Israel was identified as "a formidable regional power, benefiting from the support of the United States and in possession of nuclear weapons." The basic problem defined by the authors was "the formation of two nations on a single land, source of two political pathologies, one born of domination and the other of privation." They were particularly critical of Ariel Sharon, stating that he "claimed to struggle for the survival of Israel by oppressing and asphyxiating the Palestinian populations, by destroying schools, archives and property

[16] The quotes in this paragraph are from Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias, *Les Juifs ont-ils un avenir ?*, JC Lattès, 2001, p. 222.

[17] Ibid, p. 224.

[18] Edgar Morin, Sami Naïr, Danièle Sallenave, "Israël-Palestine, le cancer," *Le Monde*, June 4, 2002.

records, blowing up houses, breaking up water pipes, and engaging, in Jenin, in a carnage whose extent it is prohibited to know." Sharon failed to understand, they wrote, that his repressive policies were contributing to jeopardizing Israel's chances of survival by pushing the Palestinians to desperation. The solution could by no means be a "Bantustanization of the fragmented Palestinian territories."

The real "crime" of the authors was to point out "an incredible paradox": "the Jews of Israel, descendants of the victims of a form of apartheid known as the ghetto, are ghettoizing the Palestinians… The Jewish victims of inhumanity are displaying a terrible inhumanity. The Jews, scapegoats for all evils, are scapegoating Arafat and the Palestinian authority, declared responsible for attacks that they are prevented from preventing." The authors go on to explain how the "new wave of anti-Judaism, born of the Israeli-Palestinian cancer," which was spreading "throughout the Arab-Islamic world," was a manifestation of "the dialectic of two hatreds feeding each other," "two scorns, that of the dominant Israeli and that of the colonized Palestinian." This dynamic had begun to "metastasize in the world," leading to a situation in which "a silent rancor against Jews identified with Israel" had overtaken a part of the youth of North African origin, while "Jewish so-called community institutions fostered the idea of Jewish exceptionalism within the French nation and unconditional solidarity with Israel."

While clearly shocked by the situation they were describing, the authors never suggested that this dialectic of hatred was inevitable. Instead they suggested the importance, in France, of promoting fraternization between Arabs and Jews within the parameters of French citizenship, pointing to the example of how the French and Germans managed to liquidate their ancestral hatreds in a few short decades. "Some great gestures of recognition of the dignity of the Other can change the situation," they wrote. This would require action on the part of the UN; it would require a peacekeeping force to intercede between the parties in conflict; and it would require the U.S. to change its policies and refrain from including the Palestinian resistance under the heading of "anti-Western terrorism." It would require taking seriously the Arab countries' offer to recognize Israel in exchange for a return to the 1967 borders. In short, the authors were trying to be constructive. Although they were found guilty in 2005, the verdict was later overturned and they were absolved of any suspicion of propagating "Judeophobic" sentiments.

To believe that Edgar Morin could be "Judeophobic" is clearly a major stretch of the imagination. Clearly, when one is familiar with this presence on the French intellectual scene for the past 60 years, it's not as if his fundamental criticism of Israeli policy means that he is overjoyed to see Israel and, especially, the Israelis, placed in such grave danger. Without identifying explicitly as a Zionist, he emphasizes abundantly that he understands the tenacity of the Zionist project of a Jewish state. In his own system of classification, there are clear distinctions drawn between "anti-semitism," "anti-Judaism" and what he calls "anti-Israelism" (which includes an anti-Zionist variety and a variety whose negative attitude toward Israel stems mostly from the refusal to return to 1967 borders).[19] In a nutshell, "anti-semitism was born of racism and conceived of Jews as descendants of an inferior or perverse race, the semitic race." This notion "replaced Christian anti-Judaism which conceived of the Jews as bearers of a religion guilty of having killed Jesus." The term anti-semitism cannot make sense in

[19] The quotes and paraphrases in this paragraph and the next are all taken from "Antisémitisme, antijudaïsme, anti-israélisme" published in *Le Monde* on February 19, 2004 and included in *Le monde moderne et la question juive*, Seuil, 2006, p. 255-264.

the Arab world, since Arabs too are semites, so Morin prefers in this case to return to anti-Judaism stripped of the original notion of "deicide." He goes into further historical detail on all these terms but the point of the demonstration is to state that the new anti-Israelism is not a product of the older anti-Judaism or European anti-semitism, but indeed of Israeli policy itself. In French opinion, "this anti-Israelism has drifted very little toward anti-Judaism." Israel's negative image in France is largely Israel's responsibility and it simply cannot be blamed on scapegoats such as "Arabs" or "Islamic fundamentalists" or global justice activists.

Morin does not deny the existence of what he calls a new "Arab anti-Judaism" but he parts company with the conservatives in emphasizing that its cause is in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself and not in some mysterious Arabized remix of European fascism. Morin tries to understand the sentiment of those for whom public criticism of Israeli policy is a blow to their own Jewish identity and he rehearses the whole set of arguments that they repeat to themselves, to the effect, for example, that Israel is the only democracy in the region—that the suicide bombers are the "real" aggressors. Their ultimate problem, he says, is that they cannot see that Israeli policy persecutes and humiliates the Palestinians and that any political discourse that denies this has no purpose other than to protect the Israeli Defense Forces, the Israeli state and the Israeli right from any criticism.

Why can they not see and feel this? Morin answers this question by saying that a number of French intellectuals of Jewish origin, who used to be motivated by a humanistic universalism, underwent a major change in the 1970s when they broke their ties with one variety or another of Marxism and turned back toward their "roots," rediscovered the Torah and became self-styled defenders of the Jewish people. He is referring clearly to the obvious and significant cases of Benny Lévy and Alain Finkielkraut but also to others who have become, in Morin's term, "Judeocentric." They have lost their ability, he says, to understand why people might feel compassion toward the Palestinians for the oppression they suffer.

Here is one reason among others, but an important one, why practical and sustainable solutions to the conflict have not been implemented. Such a settlement, for Morin, would involve not just an equitable solution to the Palestinian question but also more equitable Western policies toward the Arab and Muslim world. It would require serious international supervision, since the two major parties are unable to solve the conflict on their own. In short, there are practical solutions available, but they appear totally unrealistic today. More disasters will unfortunately be in store, concludes Morin, until such time as the real world can handle realistic solutions.