

# Equations in Contemporary Anti-Zionism: A Conceptual Analysis

Shalem Coulibaly\*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article, which is based on several articles and research projects, aims first and foremost to present the *criminogenic nature of contemporary antisemitism*, which certain people, including people of African descent, have unfortunately adopted—through mimicry or imitation—as a result of ignorance or political calculation.<sup>1</sup> It forms the final part of a larger work entitled “Africa and Antisemitism: From Indifference to Temptation and Antisemitic Speech.” It is resolutely opposed to antisemitism, especially among some Africans who have contributed to diatribes against Jews in France.

## 2. FALSE EQUATIONS BETWEEN ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM: THE ART OF MISREPRESENTING HISTORY AND POLITICS

Many intellectuals who cannot be suspected of antisemitism reject the equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. The questions that I wish to raise in this context are as follows. Have they reflected on the contours of Durban I? Have they taken the time to decipher the logic of the anti-Zionist discourse, its critical ambiguities and the silence that it tends to impose on any defense of the Jewish cause? For me, the contemporary anti-Zionist discourse encompasses a dangerous performative contradiction. Combating antisemitism amounts to accepting the need to demonstrate the conceptual limits of the most objective criticisms. When anti-Zionists claim that they are not antisemites, how is one to interpret or gauge their scathing attacks on the legitimacy of the State of Israel? How is one to understand their calls for sanctions against Israel and the very existence of Jews in Israel! And not just in Israel but elsewhere. There are dangerous forms of objectivity. America is not Zion, but anti-Zionists are silent when the American flag and the Israeli flag are burned side by side with the same rage. This demonstrates the primary and basic anti-Americanism of the anti-Zionists, if not a performative contradiction.

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\* Professor of Philosophy, University of Ouagadougou (UO), Burkina Faso. Former Senior Visiting Scholar, YIISA, Yale University.

<sup>1</sup> In 2006, during a Paris march in support of Lebanon organized by anti-Zionists, many young Africans among the protesters chanted the slogan: “Zionism is the criminal DNA of mankind.” Marches in support of the Lebanese people also took place in several African countries. In Senegal, for example, the Israeli flag was burned by a mob that included several elected politicians.

Anti-Zionism thus does what it claims not to do, namely to be against the Jewish state but not against the Jews. We must remain lucid. Is it not so that the denial expressed by the prefix “anti” in anti-Zionism and antisemitism nowadays follows the same logic as the hatred of Jews and the desire to wipe them of the face of the earth? Until we have conceptualized and deconstructed the equation of these two terms, we must treat them as identical in the fight against antisemitism. Even a critical and objective anti-Zionist knows very well that, in a conflict, one cannot innocently set oneself up as a critic or judge of the protagonists. In fact, the differentiation between anti-Zionism and antisemitism is formalistic and specious, because, strictly speaking, they involve the same intent, the same hatred of the Jews. In *L’Imprescriptible*,<sup>2</sup> Jankélévitch explains that anti-Zionism is a form of linguistic trickery to justify antisemitism. An anti-Zionist, he argues, is a person who gives himself the right to be democratically antisemitic and to democratically popularize his hatred. Jankélévitch observes:

Anti-Zionism is in this respect an unexpected windfall, because it gives us permission and even the right—even the duty—to be antisemitic in the name of democracy. Anti-Zionism is justified antisemitism, finally put at the disposal of all. It grants permission to be democratically antisemitic.

In reality, anti-Zionism has the same target as antisemitism, namely the Jews. Otherwise, why plant bombs in synagogues in Paris or murder children and teachers at a Jewish school in Toulouse? Paris is not Jerusalem. Toulouse is not Tel Aviv. The era of globalization would thus appear to be an opportunity for anti-Jewish ideologies to prosper. Africans must understand this anti-Zionist hoax in order not to misunderstand this quagmire of antisemitism, which fraudulently posits the following equations: Zionism = colonialism, Zionism = apartheid and Zionism = racism.<sup>3</sup> These equations, which are genuine historical travesties, relate to problems about which all Africans should be deeply concerned. They amount to nothing more than a revisionist form of African history and suffering. After all, have the people who come up with these equations even considered the history of colonialism and the desire of colonizers to civilize the savages? When have the Jews ever wanted to Hebraicize Palestinians so that they become Jews? Those who deceitfully establish these false equations should re-read Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse sur le Colonialisme!*

In order to prove that this so-called objective criticism of Israel’s is actually a refusal to engage with the Jews, I will analyze another anti-Zionist equation, which posits that: economic boycott of Israel = Middle East peace.

### 3. THE ANTI-ZIONIST ECONOMIC BOYCOTT AND THE REJECTION OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The era of globalization that characterizes the 21st century is a period of homogenization of modern economic, political, and cultural habitus. This bold global desire to transcend

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L’Imprescriptible* (1986), pp. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> These equations are an unwholesome form of revisionism. After a visit to the Middle East, Desmond Tutu compared Palestine to a ghetto and Israeli democracy to apartheid. There can be no doubt that this was a misrepresentation of history and a sell-out of African suffering in the name of the Palestinian cause.

borders and achieve economic *rapprochement* between states has been accompanied by many upheavals placing contemporary attitudes between light and darkness, between hope and confusion. Likewise, the ideals of brotherhood and interhuman equality have stumbled over isolationism and communitarianism, religious fanaticism, and the blindness of terrorism, which is also global in nature. It is true that the contradictions and negative consequences of economic globalization are obvious and indisputable. The increasing impoverishment of many newly independent countries gives rise to the clamor of despair and revolt, while the economic crisis weakens the social and political foundations of the richest and most powerful states. But these economic consequences, while tragic, can still be fixed. This is because the essence of economics is exchange. Economic exchange, whether in the form of barter or capitalist speculation, even when forced and unevenly balanced, still constitutes a favorable opportunity for each of the participants. Economic exchange is thus a path to dialogue. Indeed, as men trade and exchange items and goods among themselves, they are bound to and have duties toward one another; as men are driven by quantitative interest, they can gradually correct their mistakes and significantly reduce inequalities born of economic games and challenges. Here, the commercial spirit remains open to other competitors and rivals, without rejecting them. Economically, the face and the existence of others are still significant, despite the usual selfishness that rules the business world. The economic interest requires collaboration and negotiation. Even at the height of apartheid, the boycott of South Africa was never so barbaric or insane, let alone systematic. States that currently support the boycott of Israel never stopped trading with South Africa, African countries included. Why then this harshness and intransigence toward Israel? Do the people who advocate and organize the global boycott against Israel really want peace between Israelis and Palestinians? Why do they not boycott the Palestinians when they set off bombs and launch missiles against unarmed Israeli civilians?

Finally, if economic exchange, as already noted, is not simply a process for circulating goods but also a fundamental means for interacting with each other, as well as a practical method for maintaining fairness, how should we interpret these boycotts of Israel? How can we deconstruct the false equations that the anti-Zionists use to stigmatize Israel? Is there desire for a quick peace in the Middle East? I doubt it! This is no longer a secret to anyone. Sympathy for the Palestinian cause, the pretext for contesting the State of Israel, is no more than a political accessory for the anti-Zionists, whose psyches are filled with anti-Jewish hatred, as well as disapproval and denial of very idea of a Jewish state, a state for the Jews. Clearly, the anti-Zionists/antisemites refuse to acknowledge their rejection of the existence of a free, autonomous, and independent Jewish state in the middle of the Arab world. What is emerging in the globalization of anti-Zionism, even in its objective and critical manifestations, is thus the political relinquishment of the Jews to condemnation and terrorism. I can endure these little unpleasanties. If this form of antisemitism can help Africans understand what it is that is outrageous about the attitudes of anti-Zionists, I believe it is important, as an African who has witnessed European and African antisemitism, to summarize my views on antisemitism in Europe over the past twenty years. It was this approach to antisemitism that enabled us — my colleagues and me — to create an association for dialogue between Jews and Africans (JUAF) in the 1980s, at a time when the far-right parties were demonizing the Jews, although nobody had foreseen intercommunity conflicts, especially between black extremists or Afro-Europeans and European Jews.

#### 4. A BRIEF PHENOMENOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism should not only be studied by sociologists and historians or left only to politicians to tackle. Philosophers should be the first to take an interest in it. The foundations of Western antisemitism are certainly theological, but there is a long list of the philosophers who have written about the Jews, from Kant to Sartre, by way of Hegel and many others. Antisemitism must be subjected to a multidisciplinary and multinational or global approach.

##### A. *Antisemitism is not a disease*

With friends, we spent many nights discussing the question whether antisemitism was a Western disease. A disease that, as a result of colonialism and now globalization, has been inoculated into the victims of colonialism and is now manifesting itself in strange and astonishing ways. But this idea of a disease was and remains unacceptable to me, due to the Levinasian concept of responsibility. Indeed, how can a sick person be held fully responsible for his actions? I objected that, if antisemitism was a disease, it would have been impossible to hold Hitler, his acolytes, and his followers in Europe responsible and culpable. Why did Jaspers take up arms against Nazi Germany while Heidegger was sympathetic to Nazism? There is no inevitability to becoming antisemitic. In other words, one embraces antisemitic theories by choice and out of conviction. Similarly, I rejected the idea that a victim of colonialism could use the evils of colonialism as an excuse to support and participate in antisemitic hatred. Having been a victim of colonialism does not annul our responsibility or the key choices we make in life. Despite these theoretical differences, we agreed that antisemitism was contagious—hence its expansion. It remained for me to find a definition that would encompass the permanence of antisemitism, its re-emergence and its adoption by colonized peoples—victims, as Levinas says, of the “same hatred of the other man,” the same racism “of which antisemitism would be the prototype” for all “policies of internment and social oppression.”<sup>4</sup> Starting from Levinas’ thinking, I recorded my own perceptions of the surrounding antisemitism. For my part, I came up with three intersecting definitions of antisemitism, which I will discuss below.

##### B. *Antisemitism is a problem of alterity, a rejection, and a stubborn resistance to the presence and free existence of the other*

Antisemitism is not simply a manifestation of hostility or Judeophobia. As Levinas writes, antisemitism “is the repugnance felt towards the unknown of the other’s psyche, the mystery of his interiority.”<sup>5</sup> That is to say that, for the antisemite, the Jew must lose his foreignness, at the very least that which makes him a Jew: Judaism, Zionism, Israel, and so forth. It is this entire logic of assimilation and exclusion that Levinas sums up and criticizes in his words. With this definition, we come face to face with a problem that is at once epistemological and existential. At the existential, intersubjective level, we are dealing with the repulsion of the other—the Jew in his capacity as a Jew. At the episte-

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<sup>4</sup> See the dedication by Levinas in *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (1974) and *Difficile liberté* (1984) p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *L’Au-delà du verset* (1982), p. 22.

mological level, the repugnance felt toward the mystery of the interiority of the Jew is a product of the classical and modern Western concept of the composition of knowledge. The rapport that the antisemite wishes to establish with the Jew is therefore part of the same paradigm as the relationship between subject and object. The antisemite, being a subject *par excellence*, a traditional or transcendental ego,<sup>6</sup> wishes to be the master and the owner of the relationship with the object—the Jewish being. From the perspective of the existential dialectic, it is the antisemite who creates the Jew and the Jew's existence. Sartre was not an antisemite but an objective, engaged intellectual, indeed a philosemite. As already noted, objectivities and intellectual prowess can be costly.

In this kind of relational structure, subject and object remain in a state of difference that only the subject is able to manage and control. Nietzsche described this type of differentiation as the *pathos of distance*. The subject, who is master and owner, conserves his interiority, which is impregnable but always sealed to the object, whose alterity he incorporates without ever merging with the object. This constitution of the object by the subject should be understood as a characteristic and a specificity of civilization. To illustrate this proposition, let us consider the issue of translation. For Rémi Brague, an expert on the Middle Ages, every translation simultaneously comprises aspects of transport, imitation, and rivalry. For Western civilization, according to Brague, these three actions, which are inherent to translation, hinge on the method of inclusive digestion, which includes the object while maintaining its alterity or foreignness, while the subject conserves its interiority.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, Brague notes:

Within the genus "appropriation," we can distinguish two manners of appropriating. I propose to call them "inclusion" and "digestion." ... In the case of an artificial inclusion, the enclosed object is maintained in one particular position, chosen because it facilitates observation. ... This produces a paradoxical relationship between the interior and the exterior, the inherent and the foreign. What becomes the interior does not lose its alterity for all that. It is even, precisely by its internalization that the object is conserved in its alterity. ... European civilization, according to my thesis, is based on the model of inclusion.

These words sum up perfectly the Jewish people's various connections with Europe, and European civilization, from their expulsion from Spain until the Holocaust. In contrast to the full digestive appropriation of the object (e.g., Hitler's final solution), inclusive appropriation (a symbol of the subtlety of post-Nazi antisemitism!) utilizes the denial of the object without a final solution. In this *pathos of distance*, the subject keeps its object under imperial control, where mastery, exclusion, and repulsion are always repeated. This ontological mastery of the self borders on total, totalitarian control. From this perspective, the Jew, in contrast to the Westerner, despite more than 2,000 years of coexistence, will remain other and foreign, like the object before the subject. Whatever his contribution to European society, the Jew—a "foreign" cultural and textual object that has been included and digested theologically and is politically tolerated and assimilated—will always be maintained in his original difference, not of his own volition but

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<sup>6</sup> When faced with Kant or Hegel or, to a different extent, Sartre, we are dealing with the same phenomenology of the Jewish being.

<sup>7</sup> Rémi Brague, *Au moyen du Moyen-Age: Philosophies médiévales en chrétienté, judaïsme et islam* (2006), pp. 264-284.

purely due to the desire of the subject. He cannot change his status or claim the status of the subject. Finally, it is worth remembering that contemporary antisemitism is the desire to reduce the other to the image and the will of the Subject or the Self. Reduction always reflects the taste of the day. Like the antisemite, the anti-Zionist does not wish to brutally eliminate the Jews. Politically, he wants to determine the place of the Israelis, not only in the Middle East, but everywhere. He wants to control the Jewish destiny. Against this background, the consequences for the Jewish state are more than obvious.... In response to a civilization that insists on affording good treatment to the alien within its gates, another civilization states "become what I want you to be, because you are in my home."

*C. Antisemitism is a language and a worldview*

Albert Camus said: "My language is my homeland." This definition of a mother tongue is similar to an aphorism in the West African Bambara and Dioula languages, which states: *kouman yé douniale yé* (speech is the world). In other words, the world is language, a language through which people construct the world they have inherited in their image. This implies a performative language, speech taking shape within intersubjectivity and social horizontality. Language does not only create the world, it is a worldview that is constantly rebuilt by speakers. Maternal or paternal, language is inherited from others. Language is the first humanization of our being. Contemporary antisemitism is a language that is transmitted from place to place, from Western civilization to others nations. This language perfects itself but never changes its nature. Despite their evolution and their reciprocal borrowing, French and English will never become the same language, each preserving its morphology and particular worldview. Antisemitism is a language of differentiation that endorses difference to the point of controversy and endless conflict. Put simply, antisemitism is the constantly renewed meta-narrative of a civilization founded on the rejection of peaceful and generous coexistence with the Jews. Combating contemporary antisemitism requires us to collectively rethink all the codes of modernity, along with religious hermeneutics.

*D. Contemporary antisemitism is not new: it is simply performed by new people in new places*

Antisemitism represents a stagnation in the development of world history. It is an extension of the same logic of Jew-hatred and the same machinery that popularizes Jewish stereotypes: stereotypes of religious and secular antisemitism adopted by other peoples. As a result, what is incorrectly referred to as the new antisemitism is merely a change of signs and signifiers. Through their speech and based on their own historicity, the new antisemites are expressing and updating inherited antisemitic signs. It is clear that the signified "Jew" remains identical, whatever the new signifiers of exclusion and hatred. The expressive and performative differences between contemporary forms of antisemitism do nothing to change the permanence of antisemitic stereotypes, which are scattered and transported around the globe. Antisemitism continues to this day. This is precisely because of the permanence of the Name used by antisemites. Antisemitic signifiers that are transferred elsewhere take on local color. The themes of this language may be changed or recreated indefinitely without any change to the signified "Jew" or its stigmatizing stereotypes. This aggressive permanence confronting the signified "Jew"

is not just political or historical. I believe that it is precisely at the sociological level that one becomes aware of the specific problem of the Name “Jew,” through the entanglement of the low antisemitism of the poor and the high antisemitism of the rich and the elites. Moreover, African elites form no exception. Globalization places condemnation of Israel, which is treated as a rogue state, in the mouths of every people and every country.<sup>8</sup>

Contemporary antisemitism is thus not new, or a renewal of past forms of antisemitism, but a simply a globalised intensification of a timeless phenomenon. New political actors and peoples are appropriating the themes of religious and secular antisemitism that have established the Name “Jew” as a problematic signified or an issue to be resolved. Whether one is looking at Sodom, Athens, Rome, Crown Heights, Belleville, Brussels, or Durban, it is always the same antisemitic language that is performed dialectically by local languages. The new antisemites merely fan the thematic flames of persistent antisemitism. This universalization explains—but does not justify—the inanity of the antisemitism of the African Diaspora in Europe and the United States and the temptation of antisemitism for the African continent, where anti-Zionism is following the global trend. In other words, all peoples and communities can freely use antisemitic speech, with or without the addition of only a specific emphasis.

Antisemitism metamorphoses without ever changing its nature. Just like a venomous snake that sheds its skin still remain remains a venomous snake, antisemitism retains its harmfulness and its criminogenic logic. This global proliferation of antisemitism explains—but does not justify—the antisemitism found among Africans and other peoples.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is worth noting that contemporary anti-Zionism is etched into Western civilization as it is in other human cultures. It is the typical Western way of approaching the Jewish “being,” who has thus been turned into a global scapegoat. Culturally, politically, and theologically, antisemitism is reprehensible and must be combated. Economic globalization, which goes hand in hand with global shrinkage as a result of new information and communication technologies, will give rise not only to a new antisemitism but also to the continuous adaptation and adoption of anti-Zionism by other peoples. This process of delocalization and relocation has already taken place between America, which is home to the antisemitism of the Nation of Islam, and Afro-European radicals and activists such as the *Tribu Ka* group and other expatriate African nationalists, who are known as Ethiopianists. It is also poised to expand to Africa. Due to the criminogenic nature of antisemitism, it is important to spare Africa as much as possible. Because of the tragic history of black Africans, which is often compared to that of the Jews, black antisemitism is incomprehensible and unacceptable, not to mention outrageous. Afro-European extremists have spread their tentacles to Africa. They describe all blacks or Africans who enter into dialogue with Jews as traitors. The *Tribu Ka* website states that that all pro-Zionist Africans should simply move to Israel. Africa has known religious, theological, and political antisemitism for a very long time. Islamic and Christian antisemitism has a long history. What will become of it in future with the rise

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<sup>8</sup> In 2008, in Africa, I was on a committee judging the master’s dissertation of a political science student. Without hesitation, he counted Israel among the states that fail to respect international law.

of religious fanaticism? At present, it is clear that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are increasingly converging around the world.

The definitions of antisemitism that I have provided here, which are frequently harsh and unpleasant, are primarily addressed to Africans. Apart from South Africa, where trade unionists and political figures openly demand a boycott of Israel, African anti-Zionism has hardly been the subject of systematic study. This gap must be filled. It is important to determine what can be done to tackle this antisemitism in the future, because the evil—or venom—that it represents could be fatal, first and foremost, to the Africans themselves, especially to African states already weakened by ethnicism. Any involvement or complacency on the part of Africans in the face antisemitism is a negation of their own history, because the arguments used by Third-Worldists and anti-Zionists contain elements of African historicity. This leads me to the following questions.<sup>9</sup> How can any African be antisemitic in the name of the Palestinian cause or for any other reason? Will the antisemitism of the African Diaspora find similar expression in Africa? How should we judge and evaluate antisemitism in Africa? What analytical tools can be used for this purpose? Which Africa are we talking about?<sup>10</sup> Despite the lack of statistics on antisemitism in black Africa, should African antisemitism be regarded as an important or a very small phenomenon or epiphenomenon. Is anti-Zionism, a modern mask for Jew-hatred, effective among African intellectuals in black Africa? Are there other ways to properly understand and describe antisemitism in Africa and among Africans? Given that America has Americanized European antisemitism and Afro-Europeans have Europeanized African-American antisemitism, is it not likely that black Africa will soon Africanize the antisemitism of its Diaspora? When some African-American nationalists adopted the antisemitic discourse in the 1960s and 1970s, there was talk of an epiphenomenon. When young blacks in France openly confessed, in front of the camera, to being antisemitic and proud of being so, there was also talk of an epiphenomenon, until these young people started prowling the streets of Jewish neighborhoods to beat up Jews. In the African context, it is not true that those who dare to describe antisemitism as an epiphenomenon are indirectly responsible for attacks on the synagogues of African Jewish converts? Is it possible that Africa is seeing the birth of a new antisemitism—the antisemitism of tomorrow?

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<sup>9</sup> These guiding questions are taken from a presentation I gave at Yale University. In this article, I have chosen to focus on anti-Zionism, but a larger work on antisemitism is in progress.

<sup>10</sup> The issues discussed in this article relate to sub-Saharan Africa. There are many different African Diasporas, but they are all defined by their common African roots, hence Afro-American, Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Caribbean, and even Afro-European.