

The murder of Ilan Halimi and the malaise of the multiculturalist left (2006)

INTRODUCTORY NOTE : this text was written 17 years ago, in February 2006, and it shows that the left has been denying the existence of antisemitism in France for a long time and that this attitude has nothing to do with the so-called “Israelo-Palestinian” conflict. At the time I criticised multiculturalism as a reactionary and bourgeois ideology that only served to divide the workers of different cultures and nations as if the working people were incapable of building together a universalist culture on their own. Today I would not use the word “multiculturalist” but “identitarian ” or “ left identitarian ” as identity politics has replaced or merged with multiculturalism as the dominant ideology of the left.

The reactions of organisations such as the Trotskyist Ligue communiste révolutionnaire, the left-wing anti-Zionist Union juive française pour la paix (UJFP) and the Coordination des appels pour une paix juste au Proche-Orient (CAJPO), the left-wing anti-racist Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples (MRAP) or the Ligue des droits de l'homme (founded during the Dreyfus affair in 1898), or left-wing intellectuals such as Esther Benbassa [university teacher and then Green senator from 2011 onwards], to the kidnapping and murder of Ilan Halimi and the self-proclaimed "gang of barbarians" perfectly illustrate the pernicious effects of current multiculturalism in the French political sphere. While pretending to fight against “communitarianism”, all these people invoke a sacrosanct “caution”.

This "caution" may seem justified a priori after the so-called “RER D affair in which a (non) "Jewish" mythomaniac woman claimed to have been attacked by "Blacks and Arabs". But the same caution is never exercised by the multiculturalist left when an excited, drunk, clumsy or xenophobic cop, a neighbour gone mad, or a right-wing or far-right bill poster kills a young person of foreign origin. If “prudence” was a virtue for the Left, it should logically apply to attacks and murders targeting North Africans and Africans as well as those targeting Jews.

But in one case (violence or murder committed by cops) multiculturalist thinkers believe that caution is unnecessary because this branch of the state is permeated by racism (which is true); they also believe that the neighbour who shoots young people out of his council flat window or the murderous bill poster is a racist or a fascist (which is often true, but not always).

In the other case (a gang of young suburban thugs and torturers), multiculturalists feel that they have to walk on eggshells before expressing an opinion on the racist dimension of the torture and murder perpetrated by the "gang of barbarians" of Bagneux. But if this gang had consisted only of Franco-French people, the multiculturalist left would not have called for "caution". When young Zionists beat up the antisemitic stand-up comedian Dieudonné in Fort-de-France in March 2005, no one thought that a long investigation was necessary to denounce the racist nature of this act. Everyone believed the words of Dieudonné and not those of the young Zionist thugs when this "comedian" claimed that they had used racist insults against him.

Left-wing multiculturalists don't always appeal to prudence. It's because the victim of the Bagneux murder is Jewish and some of his killers and torturers are of African or North African origin that they call for caution. And this is the song sung by the entire multiculturalist left, from the MRAP (which then turned around and changed its mind once

again) to Esther Benbassa. Apart from the necessary caution until the investigation is completed, the multiculturalist left puts forward six arguments that do not stand up to scrutiny or are incoherent.

1) **“The leaders of the Jewish community (the CRIF) are fierce reactionaries.”**

Yes, it's true: just remember Roger Cuckierman's provocative statements about Le Pen's results in 2002 (Cuckierman was the head of the CRIF at the time and according to the Israeli daily Haaretz that interviewed him just between the two turns of the 2002 presidential election: *“Roger Cuckierman said he hoped Le Pen's victory (on Sunday) would serve to reduce Muslim anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli behavior, because his score is a message to Muslims to behave themselves.”*). Not to mention the fact that the colonialist policies of Israeli governments are systematically supported by the CRIF. But this argument hardly seems coherent when it is put forward by the multiculturalist left because the leaders of the French Council of the Muslim Faith [a body created in 2003 by President Sarkozy that tried to help all Muslim associations cooperate with the French state, and which does not exist today, in 2023] or Tariq Ramadan are equally reactionary. This does not prevent the multiculturalist left from following their positions on the issue of the veil (hijab) in schools or the reproduction of the Danish cartoons of Mohammed by *Charlie Hebdo*.

2) **“Stressing the antisemitic dimension of Ilan Halimi's murder leads to an increase in antisemitism.”**

This type of argument has never (and rightly) stopped the multiculturalist left in the face of police "blunders", neighbourhood murders committed by the National Front or far-right militants against young Franco-Maghrebians or Franco-Africans.

Antisemitic prejudices and acts are the sole responsibility of... antisemites, not of the Jews! Similarly, the African or North African victims of racism do not need to be silenced, it is their aggressors who need to be silenced.

The multiculturalist left is incoherent. More seriously, it is rehashing an old argument (which was used by reactionary Jews for centuries until the extermination of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War): Jews must keep a low profile, otherwise they will attract even more hostility.

3) **“There are certainly prejudices against the Jews, but they are to be put on the same level as those against the Bretons or the Auvergnats (French regional minorities).”**

“To believe that they were driven by an articulated antisemitic ideology would undoubtedly be an exaggeration. Like many people, they were wrongly convinced that all Jews were rich and that they could make a lot of money out of this kidnapping. Prejudices of this kind – the stinginess of the Auvergnats, the stubbornness of the Bretons, etc. – are commonplace.”

This "argument", put forward by Esther Benbassa in her article in *Le Monde* on 25 January 2006, would be comical if the context were not so tragic. We look forward to the studies of this eminent historian on the Auvergnat genocide or the Breton genocide!

4) **“If the young people of the Bagneux gang think that "all Jews have money", this is not antisemitism, it is just a "stereotype".”**

This "argument" was first put forward by the cops (who know a thing or two about ... "stereotypes" !), the judges, and then by some intellectuals. According to these "experts" on antisemitism, raw prejudice does not deserve to be called antisemitism.

It is particularly distressing to see "left-wing" activists saying that anything that is not covered by the law is neither racist nor antisemitic. As if laws – rules made (at best) by

majorities in bourgeois parliaments to establish a minimal coexistence between individuals and classes with different and even opposed interests – could sum up all of humanity's knowledge of racism and antisemitism!

Even a moderate multiculturalist sociologist like Michel Wieworka admits that "*today, we find all sorts of spontaneous expressions of hatred towards Jews, especially among immigrants from the Arab-Muslim world, from sub-Saharan Africa, but also among the French West Indians, that (...) antisemitism has become an opinion again*", "*in the suburbs, and not only*", he said. And he added that Jews are "*perceived [by what he calls the "excluded"] as those who have succeeded in their integration*".

5) "Jews should not use their Jewishness to defend themselves, and non-Jews should not use the religious terrain to affirm their solidarity with them."

This is a more subtle and, above all, more solid argument. Indeed, there is no reason to go to the synagogue, or to mobilise behind the priests, pastors and rabbis, if you are an atheist. It is perfectly possible to demonstrate or gather in a separate place and not participate in religious ceremonies or demonstrations called by religious authorities, while expressing solidarity with all Jews who feel affected and targeted by this murder. It should be noted, however, that the multiculturalist left has no qualms about supporting a reactionary Muslim philosopher like Tariq Ramadan and parading him around social forums; about making people believe that the veil is an indispensable religious requirement for young schoolgirls, or even a manifestation of "feminism", and denouncing as "reactionary" Muslim intellectuals who think the opposite; about having Muslim prayers recited during anti-war demonstrations (in the UK), when it is not organising rallies in which women are separated from men.... if they "wish" (in the UK, again). . The multiculturalist left remembers secularism when it comes to the Jewish religion but not when it comes to the Muslim religion.

6) "The unanimity of the media-political class is suspicious. One does not find the same determination when it comes to racist crimes against Africans or North Africans."

Yes, that's true, but so what? We remember, for example, that Nicole Guedj went to see the mythomaniac on the RER D who only had a few scratches (which she had inflicted on herself), but that the under-Secretary of State did not deign to visit an African mother whose child had been killed by a stray bullet fired by a policeman who was cleaning his gun in the flat next door. But is this a reason not to denounce the antisemitic nature of the act of the "gand of barbarians" of Bagneux, especially now that it is known that they have already attacked other Jewish personalities?

7) "*As for the photos sent to the family by the kidnappers and the violent humiliations they inflicted on their victim, they seem to have been inspired both by the staging of the hostage-takers in Iraq and by the images of abuse inflicted on Iraqi prisoners in American jails,*" writes Esther Benbassa.

The author admits the possibility that the Bagneux kidnappers may have been influenced by the numerous live killings filmed by the supporters of political Islam, and then immediately equates these killings with the torture by the US army. It is difficult to see how this proves that the "barbarians of Bagneux" are not anti-Semitic! Especially when we know that one of the favourite themes of anti-Zionist and Islamist propaganda is that Israel is responsible for the Iraq war... and that Salafist propaganda has been found in them.

8) "*The crime we deplore today is not only a question of race, ethnicity or religion. It is first and foremost a question of our societies, societies capable of producing such monsters who feel no empathy. The trivialisation of evil through images, images that simultaneously*

distance us from this evil, neutralise it and make it familiar to us, certainly contributes to the creation of this new kind of monsters," writes Esther Benbassa.

Human barbarity did not begin with the invention of television – alas! These philosophical reflections on the "trivialisation of evil" and the manipulative power of "images" apply to all kinds of criminal acts committed in this world, and it is difficult to see how they help us to understand the specificity of what happened in Bagneux. The "communitarian" grid of interpretation is not only produced by sensationalist media or extremist Zionist organisations, it is also fed by thousands of small incidents that occur in each "community" and spontaneously feed mutual prejudices. As long as the exploited of each "community" do not unite in common proletarian organisations against their exploiters, as long as they put up with this world that profits from their divisions, religious, multiculturalist and nationalist interpretations will have a bright future.

9) “Stressing the antisemitic character of Ivan Halimi's murder risks fuelling "community confrontations" (i.e. between "Jews" and "Muslims") and a "criminalisation of certain communities" (i.e. "Arabs" or "Africans").”

Denouncing antisemitism does not automatically lead to communitarianism. On the other hand, presenting cultures, civilisations, religions and traditions as intangible, timeless realities, all of which should be "respected" and not harshly criticised at the risk of "hurting" those who are attached to them, does indeed pave the way for communitarianism. Unfortunately, this is how the multiculturalist left thinks, as we have seen both in the numerous discussions about the wearing of the hijab in schools and in the recent discussion about the Danish cartoons of Mohammed by *Charlie Hebdo*.

Multiculturalism leads to voluntary ethnic or ethno-religious segregation, to competition between the memories of the victims and even to confrontation between the victims. This is exactly what we are witnessing at the moment. Michel Wieworka is undoubtedly partly right when he says that "*political and religious hatred was not the starting point*" of the Bagneux crime and that "*it would be a mistake to explain this crime by ethno-religious or racial criteria*". But at the same time, its antisemitic dimension cannot be denied, even if it was not the main motivation of the kidnapers. For their victim, the result is exactly the same. And for us, there is no question of reducing this affair to the simple rubric of an “unpleasant” news item (in other words, an event which needs to be forgotten), on the pretext of not "hurting" anyone's feelings.

All racist ideas kill, directly or indirectly, whether they are directed against Jews, North Africans or Africans, and whatever the skin colour of those who defend them.

Yves Coleman, *Ni patrie ni frontières*
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