

## Ordinary Anti-Semitism

Agnès Aflalo

Extraordinary anti-Semitism is well known. It produced the Holocaust. But ordinary anti-Semitism often goes unnoticed. The former made us believe that there was a watertight border between the parties of the far-right and democracy. But the latter reveals that this border does not exist. Indeed, since language has become an accomplice of the de-demonisation of fascism, it ends up running aground on the reefs of a common hatred, anti-Semitism being only one among others. Banalised anti-Semitism turns up everywhere, striking lay people and believers, intellectuals of the right and of the left. And Lacan's School is not spared either. Let's put forward the idea that the structure of the subject of the unconscious can account for these phenomena.

### Hatred of What Has No Name

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long nourished latent anti-Semitism. It became clear in France ten years ago with the assassination of Ilan Halimi.<sup>1</sup> Since then, anti-Semitic acts have multiplied. And xenophobic discourse parades openly in provincial streets and in the capital. The relative indifference of the intellectuals to this is surprising. Too few speak out, and amongst those, many are inaudible. One might ask why. Let's put forward the idea that intellectuals are, like everyone, traversed by a hatred they themselves don't recognise. If we accept the idea that anti-Semitism is one of the names of unconscious self-hatred, we notice that this hatred spares no one. Jewish or not, everyone is concerned. Because self-hatred, more or less intense according to the circumstances, tears each one of us apart.

Indeed, hatred targets the core of our being, the core which has no name. This unnameable is like the god of Israel, impossible to say. The impossible relates not only to the fact that the word designating it, or the image representing it, are lacking. It relates in particular to the fact that God is unnameable. This is a not inconsiderable source of anti-Semitism. Hate does not cease wanting to write the name of the unnameable with the letters of the word Jew. Now, the letters that frame the core of our being –

This text originally appeared in *Lacan Quotidien*, No. 117, June 2017.

1 [TN: Reported by Kim Willsher, "Brutal murder was anti-Semitic crime, says Sarkozy", *The Guardian*, 22 February 2006, also the subject of a film directed by Alexandre Arcady (*24 Jours*, 2014), based on the book written by Ilan's mother, Ruth Halimi and Emilie Frèche, *24 Jours: la vérité sur la mort d'Ilan Halimi*, Seuil, Paris, 2009 (not translated).]



*Kern unseres Wesen*, says Freud – write no word. They act as a littoral for the flow of everyday speech. But sometimes this speech concentrates ordinary anti-Semitism to the point of making it change course. Then, for a time that can set the world ablaze, the word Jew names the unnameable core of being and the tendency to annihilate it triumphs. Then the unnameable reasserts itself in the structure, and racism and anti-Semitism become ordinary again. This is why, according to chronological time and geographical space, the word Jew makes a series with those of other heretics such as Huguenots and Cathars, Moors, Saracens and other Muslims, etc.

To make room for this unnameable is also to make room for the impossibility of putting into words the divine and demonic tendencies that inhabit everyone. But to refuse this unnameable is *ipso facto* to transform it into self-hatred and to throw it back onto the other. It then becomes hatred of the other and of the other's differences: sexual difference, but also differences in ways of life, language, skin colour, day of prayer, social environment, etc. By contrast, the 'true' religion, the Catholic faith, tends to transform this hatred into love of the neighbour. Another major pitfall. The aversion to submitting to that which has no name varies with each monotheism. Jews do not escape anti-Semitism. Hatred of what does not have a name inhabits all racism in general and anti-Semitism in particular.

### Dupes of the Unconscious

There are three forms of ordinary anti-Semitism that are fairly well distributed among the adherents of monotheism and beyond. First there is the hatred of Israel which can also assume the mask of indifference. Here, the hated Jew is the one who is no longer an exile – as if geography could abolish the unconscious space in which self-exile resides. This pretext allows us to call ourselves anti-Zionist and relegates to the background an anti-Semitism that is unknown or unacknowledged. It also rejects the Holocaust that precedes the creation of the Hebrew State.

Let us add two other forms of ordinary anti-Semitism. One denies the Jew as different and rather emphasises the "everyone is the same", Jews or non-Jews. This discourse with egalitarian intentions aims to make the differences of each one disappear. It is the regime of "all equal without exception". *Exit* the satisfaction proper to each. *Exit* the satisfaction of the leader who directs the set of "equals". This discourse is more common on the left. The more consistent the refusal of the unnameable becomes, the more ossified self-hatred becomes and the more the left veers towards the extreme. This can be seen in France and well beyond.

The other form of anti-Semitism, more frequent on the right, accentuates difference to the point of making the relation to the divine master the most precious trait of exception. This way of imposing one's difference is compatible with an "all equal except me". It's a matter of cultivating the regime of the exception that accentuates the idea of being "the only one to..." and rejects all the others that are different. *Exit* the language of the



Other, of others. The more the chosen one asserts himself, the more the scapegoat approaches.

The extreme parties are racist and anti-Semitic. But whatever its form, anti-Semitism is based on the idea that the Jew would know so well how to manage with money that he would no longer suffer from the unconscious splitting. But this is to forget that Marx made of money the universal fetish. This means that, whatever its particular use, money rejects the singularity of the unnameable satisfaction of the subject. It is therefore vain to believe that it is the cure for internal exile. Ethics cannot be bought. But it also forgets that, since Lacan, the capitalist discourse is also the discourse of the unconscious. Everyone is therefore responsible.

What anti-Semitism denies is the idea that the unnameable renders us other to ourselves. For the difference that matters is not that between one and all; it is primarily with ourselves. Self-hatred and hatred of the other are two sides of the same coin that haunts the division of the subject of the unconscious. Unbeknownst to us, it contains our own malice which is never under control. The position of the beautiful soul, its refusal of the Other, of the hypothesis of the unconscious, is therefore a guaranteed impasse. Indeed, if wars are always wars of religion, it is because religion and neurosis never cease wanting to write the belief in the unnameable that inhabits us in the fiery letters of totalitarian logic. The universal proselyte gives consistency to the exception that is not.

The unconscious always has the last word. It exiles the subject from himself. It ignores the time of the clock and its elastic space suddenly brings near what was thought to be so far off. Between the flow of language and the rock of the unnameable no border can hold. Extimacy, as expounded by Jacques-Alain Miller,<sup>2</sup> shows us that the only line of demarcation that separates the subject from the intimate enemy is made of unconscious letters to be deactivated, on the condition that we make ourselves dupes of the unconscious. This is why we have no choice but to submit to the totalitarian logic of the unconscious symptom, or to face the singularity of an unknown and nameless jouissance. In Lacan's school, where God is unconscious, there is perhaps a chance to be a heretic in a good way.

Translated by Janet Haney

2 Miller, J.-A., "L'orientation lacanienne: *Extimité*", course delivered at the Department of Psychoanalysis, University of Paris VIII, 1985-6, published in Spanish as *Extimidad, Los cursos psicoanalíticos de Jacques-Alain Miller*, Paidós, 2011.