

Tel Aviv on the Seine Flushes Out the Slithery Creatures, Part 1

It's the 14th edition of Paris Plages, a charming operation that transforms the banks of the Seine, from the Quai du Louvre all the way to rue de Crimée, into a summer playground. From mid-July to mid-August the quais are dressed up as sandy "beaches" with deck chairs, picnic tables, fun & games, rental bikes for kids, restaurants, cafés, ice cream stands, a lending library, and—for want of a dip in the river—a stretch of cool-off mist. It's all done in nice French taste with a pretty blue & white striped and bright yellow color scheme, t-shirted monitors, and an international crowd.

One day each summer a guest country is invited to bring an exotic accent to the Paris Plages river beach. Tomorrow, August 13th, it's Tel Aviv sur la Seine and, don't you know, the slithery creatures are climbing up the riverbanks, determined to strangle the very thought of Tel Aviv and the Israel that goes with it. From pseudo-intellectual analyses of the stalemate in the peace process, attributed exclusively to Israel, to ill-concealed threats to smash up the whole thing if the City Hall doesn't cancel it, the "debate" spins around a few simplistic notions. Should Tel Aviv be coddled because it's not really Israel, it's more of a Levantine Paris on the Mediterranean, populated by peace-making leftist gay-friendly secular progressives who detest Netanyahu like we do, or should Tel Aviv be kicked off the river bank until it can be kicked out of the world, no less guilty than the last baby-burning Occupier on a West Bank hilltop whose army massacred all of Gaza one year ago.

The pathetic postman Olivier Besancenot, whose moribund anti-

capitalist party [NPA] was revived last year by acting as straw man for Islamic protests against the Protective Border Operation, is ready to lead another rampage tomorrow. The Euro-Palestine site is in a state of volcanic anti-Zionist eruption. An anti-Tel Aviv petition boasts of 23,000 signatures. Riot police have been mobilized and no one knows how they will handle an ambulatory population of Zionists, non-Zionists, anti-Zionists, tourists, and caliphators moving along a narrow band between the river and the quais. To make things merrier, Euro-Palestine reports that the préfecture has authorized a mixed salad of Palestinian tifosi to hold a Gaza Beach demonstration on a stretch of the riverbank that runs from Châtelet, where the commuter trains roll in from the banlieue, and the Notre Dame bridge, where the Tel Aviv beach begins.

Resisting pressure from members of her governing coalition and beyond, the Socialist mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, currently vacationing in her native Spain, stands by Tel Aviv...after a fashion. The idea of inviting Tel Aviv germinated, she says, during her visit to Israel last May. I was there when our mayor, smartly dressed in black set off with a raspberry red jacket, addressed the opening ceremony of the 5th Global Forum for Combatting Antisemitism, organized in Jerusalem by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Speaking alternatively in French and English the mayor expressed her affection for Israel, its startups, its warmth, and vibrant energy. She was no less enthusiastic about French Jews, without whom France would not be France.

Indeed, that is the aim and purpose of domestic and foreign caliphators working to conquer, beyond a little stretch of riverbank, whole neighborhoods, the entire city, and turn the country into something that would not be France. The wedge of that operation is sic the Jews!

Nothing to do with antisemitism, perish the thought.

Personally, I don't ferret out antisemites, and I like to call people what they call themselves. So let's see how and why they won't let us enjoy a falafel on the river bank tomorrow. The general idea is that there's something indecent about hosting Tel Aviv so soon after "an 18 month-old Palestinian baby was burned alive by Jewish extremists." Not to mention last year's massacres in Gaza.

Danielle Simonnet (Parti de Gauche), a member of the mayor's coalition, denounces the "cynicism" of honoring "a festive Tel-Aviv... one year after the massacres in the Gaza Strip by the Israeli State and army while the government intensifies its policy of colonization ..." Furthermore, she laments, there was nothing planned with "Israeli humanists," no debate on the condition of the Palestinians! "Tel-Aviv is not Copacabana," she blurted out in a radio interview. "Tel-Aviv is the capital of Israel!"

The mayor's defense is curiously close to Simonnet's attack. Tel-Aviv shouldn't be confused with the State of Israel. The Paris Plages invitation is in no way a show of support for Benjamin Netanyahu's conservative government. Tel Aviv is appreciated for its night life, it welcomes sexual minorities, it's so progressive that all the intolerant people in Israel detest it! What's more, the mayor congratulates Tel Aviv for the most impressive demonstrations of solidarity with the "Palestinian child burned alive by fanatics."

Bruno Julliard, who worked his way up rather quickly from student rabble rouser to a major role on Mayor Hidalgo's team, is more succinct: "There should be no confusion between the brutal policies of the Israeli government and the city of Tel-Aviv, whose residents and elected officials take a progressive stand on the Israel-Palestine conflict."

A few rare voices were heard from political figures on the right. Congratulating the mayor on her refusal to give in to pressure, Eric Ciotti [Les Républicains] is outraged by the

controversy fueled by the far left “with anti-Semitic undercurrents.” Claude Goasguen, unfailing friend of Israel, goes one giant step further, asking how Tel-Aviv, which is something more than a beach, can be distinguished from the State of Israel. “I don’t think the residents of Tel-Aviv refused to defend their country when it was victim of Hamas rockets.”

Law enforcement, apparently, is far more concerned about the possibilities of uncontrollable violence like they had to deal with last summer, than with the geopolitical niceties of Tel Aviv as opposed to Israel, the colonies, and all that. An unidentified riot policeman admits that they are all thinking about the “antisemitic climate” that raged in Sarcelles in July of last year. While the police are stalking potential troublemakers on social media and with phone taps, elected officials, political cartoonists, militants, and commentators are stoking the flames. Or gently stirring them.

In a *Libération* op-ed, Alexandra Schwarzbrod cautions: As important as it is to denounce the Occupation and clamor for dismantlement of the colonies that deprive Palestinians of a future, it is just as important to refrain from stigmatizing everything Israeli. The reaction to the “premeditated destruction of a Palestinian family burned alive by what some in Israel call ‘Jewish jihadists’” is understandable. One might question the wisdom of the Mayor of Paris of inviting Tel Aviv a year after a war “between the Israeli army and the Palestinians of Hamas left Gaza in ruins.” But, she concludes, contact should be maintained with secular, open-minded Israelis “revolted by the occupation and the climate of intolerance that ravages their country.”

Socialist deputy Alexis Bachelay brought the debate to incandescence. Tel Aviv on the Seine, he tweeted, is tantamount to Pretoria on the Seine in the days of apartheid South Africa. Heating up from tweet to tweet, Bachelay opined that the South African apartheid regime was probably gentler

than Israel's Far Right government with its "separate development" in the form of the separation fence and the colonies. In a last attempt to clarify his statements, Bachelay explained that he was referring to last year's Gaza conflict; a level of force never used by the "militarization of apartheid."

The poor guy went too far. Fellow Socialist Jérôme Guedj awarded him a gold medal for the most idiotic tweet. I too congratulate him for displaying the crude inner pyrotechnics that are feeding this controversy and driving the anti-Zionists crazy. One thinks Tel Aviv is the capital of Israel, Bachelay knows the Israeli government is worse than apartheid South Africa, another pinches his nose over Netanyahu's "brutal politics" and most of them hug Tel Aviv as if it were an annex to the Quartier Latin.

What will tomorrow bring? A standoff, a clash, or maybe a thunderstorm. A real one, the kind nature produces.

Next year they could invite Iran. There's nothing controversial about Tehran's unsullied beaches and they can work out the details when President Rohani will be the guest of President Hollande this November.