

# The Imposture of Platforming an Impostor

## Folha de São Paulo and Bernard-Henri Lévy

por Rômulo Cristaldo<sup>i</sup>

**B**ernard-Henri Lévy, BHL to friends and detractors alike, is a French columnist of Algerian origin, a member of the Jewish community, and a self-proclaimed Zionist, who has also ventured into cinema and philosophical writing. The long list of books published by BHL, combined with the resonance his opinions achieve in major international media, might mislead the unwary into believing he is a thinker, an intellectual leader—even a philosopher. It is with this appeal to authority that the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo, on October 27, 2025, turned to BHL to continue its crusade against President Lula.

The headline, published in the waning hours of that Monday—it is worth noting, following Lula's diplomatic victories in a meeting with Trump, his rapprochement with ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), and on the eve of new positive government popularity ratings—could not be more absurd: "Lula is mistaken or lying when he accuses Israel of genocide," French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy tells Folha."

In the interview, BHL exempts the Israeli state from responsibility for the slaughter of the Palestinian population, insists on calling the massacre a "war," praises Netanyahu as a statesman, and specifically criticizes Lula for stating the obvious: that Israel's action constitutes genocide. Curiously, when Folha offers him space to criticize Jean-Luc Mélenchon—leader of the French far-right and a declared anti-Semite—BHL equivocates and turns his rhetorical cannon against the student protests in the U.S. denouncing the genocide.

In France, Bernard-Henri Lévy is far from enjoying the deference that Folha de S. Paulo grants him. The term serious French intellectuals prefer to use for him is "intellectual impostor" (Beau & Toscer, 2006). The truth is that BHL has acted as CEO of a company dedicated to the expropriation of natural resources in Africa, maintains ties to the financial market, and, despite posing as a representative of a wavering center-left, has produced works

with theocratic, colonialist, and irrationalist biases.

The core of the interview given to Folha was to deny the genocide perpetrated by Israel in the Gaza Strip. BHL presents no coherent reasoning, data, or any new interpretation to support his position. He merely states that "it is not genocide." Supposedly, the force of his words lies in the following fallacy: if it is not genocide, whoever denounces it is either misinformed or deliberately lying. To the delight of Folha de S. Paulo, this is how Bernard-Henri Lévy refers to the President of Brazil.

### *Let us pause for clarification*

What Israel calls a "war" against Hamas is, in fact, a military invasion against the civilian population. Based on the premise that the extremist Palestinian group would take refuge among civilians, the Israeli army adopted the tactic of destroying residential areas and infrastructure for water, energy, and telecommunications. Hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and NGO headquarters were also bombed. There is evidence that troops were ordered not to distinguish between combatants and civilians. Commerce was paralyzed, and the flow of humanitarian aid, blocked for months, resulted in water and food shortages.

Not coincidentally, nearly 70% of the dead on the Palestinian side in the Gaza Strip are women and children—not counting the victims of starvation, disease, and the inhumane conditions imposed by the destruction of basic survival structures. The high command of the State of Israel has declared numerous times, publicly, that its objective was the complete elimination of Hamas; recalling that they consider Hamas and the Palestinian people to be indiscernible. It must be stated clearly: these are methods of generational erasure, intended to interrupt the social reproduction of a community with a specific ethnic identity. This constitutes genocide. There is no doubt.

*Let us return...*

"Our" Folha gave voice, a headline, and prominence to a genocide denier. To someone who, in his own country, is considered an intellectual impostor—known for fallacious arguments, ambiguous positions, and embarrassing ties, to say the least. One can only guess the reason: there was an opportunity to publish something negative against Lula during a week of favorable news for the government. In its zeal to attack the politician they cannot tolerate—or rather, whom they detest to the point of anything—Folha embraced the worst of the lot.

This is not the first time the newspaper has wallowed in the mud of history. Folha supported the 1964 coup. It supported the corporate-military dictatorship that followed. In 1989, it trumpeted the declaration of Mário Amato, then president of Fiesp, that "800,000 businessmen would leave the country if Lula won the election." It sided with the right-wing candidacies of FHC, José Serra, Alckmin, and Aécio Neves. It gave ample coverage to—and enthusiastically participated in—the media spectacle surrounding Criminal Action 470 (the so-called "Mensalão"), Operation Car Wash (Lava Jato), and the irregular imprisonment of Lula. And it didn't scowl at Bolsonaro, at least until the then-president began killing people during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One thing, however, cannot be denied: the consistency of the São Paulo "big paper." Every so often, it stirs in its own filth. Apparently, the "anything goes" campaign to promote the fascist-of-the-moment for the 2026 election has already begun.

Let's start taking bets: when will Folha's next *mea culpa* arrives?

### Referências

Beau, Nicolas; Toscer, Olivier (2006). *Une imposture française*. Paris: Les Arènes.

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