

Religious Minorities in Europe: A Memory Mutates

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The Jewish Question

In 1843, in Paris, Karl Marx wrote the article *Zur Judenfrage* (On the Jewish Question) (Marx and Engels 1975, p. 146), published one year later in the journal *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (The German-French Annals) of which he was the editor. He argued against Bruno Bauer's thesis about the political emancipation of Jews in Prussia, which started in 1812. Bauer had been a friend of Marx, when they were students at the Trier University, sharing philosophical ardor against the German sacred monster Hegel and the carefree and joyful evenings of Goliards at the Trier Tavern Drinking Society.

Bauer believed that Jews would have to abandon their religious identity in order to emancipate themselves politically. According to him, the exercise of political rights as full citizens, in fact, presupposes the existence and recognition of the secular state. Religion, therefore, no longer had any relevance in the public sphere. Before the secular state, there were only the citizens and no longer religious communities. Emancipation of Jews meant for Bauer the definitive liberation from religion *tout court*.

Marx completely reversed the thesis: secular state presupposes religion. To support this statement, Marx put forward two arguments. Firstly, religion actually pervades social life, and in religion, individuals can find ways to cultivate their spirit. Therefore, political emancipation does not cancel religion; on the contrary, it reduces individuals in abstract terms, formally all equal before the state nullifying their cultural and spiritual differences. Secondly, real emancipation for all, not only for Jews, depends on the radical critique of capitalism, that is, the liberation from the materialistic constraints that generate inequality. For the Jews, such emancipation, according to Marx, who in fact repeated long-term stereotypes toward them, is more difficult because they are organically integrated into the capitalist logic since they have historically devoted themselves to lending money and to financial speculation, as Werner Sombart would argue more fully later (Sombart 1911).

In the Marx vs. Bauer controversy, we can find some seminal and crucial terms of the issue concerning religious minorities in Europe today. Both in the political field and among scholars, discussion continues on the secular nature of the state (its alleged neutrality with respect to religions), on the public relevance of religious communities, and whether a citizen can express her/himself as such even by practicing a religious faith. In fact, according to some European political leaders and intellectuals (writers, journalists, social scientists, philosophers), one of the signs of the lack of social integration of some religious minorities is the double loyalty that the members of these communities practice. They respect the laws of the state but follow, in some areas of the social life (coinciding with the area of civil law), also the norms established by their respective religious faiths. Such double loyalty is interpreted by some authoritative political leaders as evidence of the failure of multiculturalism. For example, in a speech addressed to young members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Potsdam in October 2010, Angela Merkel said: "Let's adopt the multicultural concept and live happily side by side, and be happy to be living with each other, but this concept has failed, and failed utterly" (Merkel 2010). Horst Seehofer, head of the CDU's Bavarian sister party the CSU, released a similar comment: "multiculturalism is dead." It was criticized by Stephan Kramer, the general secretary of the Central Council of Jews. This last intervention brings us back to the theme from which



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we started and to the long memory of what the Jewish question has meant in European history.

The Jewish question still teaches us many things, perhaps more than the cycle of the so-called religious wars (1524–1648), which culminated in the invention of a state's model that *secularized religions*. This political pattern neutralized the conflicts territorializing differences of faith, transforming religion into a marker of political sovereignty over a given territory and into a rule for an *artificial* social cohesion. The Westphalian principle, which was established in two peace treaties, signed in 1648, linked sovereignty with territory and religion: one king, one land, one people, and one faith that of the sovereign (Beyer 2011). This process of territorialization of religion had already begun two hundred years earlier with the politics of ethnic cleansing, inaugurated by the Catholic monarchs of Spain and then imitated by those of Portugal, against Jews and Moors. These policies were a turning point in the history of the Jews of Europe. A new diaspora began. The Jews were considered the emblem of religious diversity not compatible with the model of a territorial, ethnonational state, based on Catholicism. Subsequently, this model shaped the *Protestant* states too with a variety of national churches. The modern states governed Jewish diversity either by segregation in urban spaces or by various forms of discrimination, since the expulsion in 1492 from Spain to the Shoah. In other words, in the collective memory of Europeans, Jews have represented a type of religious diversity that has been stigmatized as not compatible with the Christian matrix of Europe (Todorov 1982). The season of the great economic, industrial and political revolutions favored the so-called emancipation of the Jews between the 18th and 19th centuries. However, it did not definitively remove the social frameworks of collective memory. On the one hand, while they were recognized as citizens in their own right, they had not ceased to be stigmatized with longstanding stereotypes, continuing in some areas of Europe to be socially and economically discriminated against. On the other, in the heat of the economic and political crisis that occurred between the two World Wars, the ancient anti-Judaism found new life in anti-Semitism. Modernity produced the Shoah (Bauman 1989).

Religious Diversity and Religious Pluralism in Europe

Rummaging in the back room of the European past history, one can find the reemergence of a constellation of words that are still part of the contemporary lexicon, familiar to politicians, journalists, writers, and ordinary people who live in Europe. The keywords are (religious) differences, (religious) diversity, and (religious) pluralism in relationship with the secular state. Combined, these three words together make up the various configuration of policies of recognition/disavowal of cultural and religious differences that characterize many European societies with various degrees of intensity. Religious diversity, in particular, can be integrated or excluded, incorporated into active policies in favor of multiculturalism or denied in the name of a clear separation between public and private, secular state and the religious sphere, as Modood and Sealy show precisely in their article in this monographic issue.

Diversity is a social fact, while pluralism is a political strategy adopted by various European ruling classes to recognize the religious difference that characterizes the various religious communities in reference to fundamental aspects of the lived religious experience by the people who belong to them (food, dressing, rites of passage, religious feasts) (Beckford 2014; Giordan and Pace 2014; Pace and Da Silva Moreira 2018). Some differences are accepted, while others are considered incompatible with the universal norms of the positive law.

From a socio-anthropological point of view, the notion of religious minorities can still be valid if we observe how in the various European societies the many and different religious communities are regulated in the legal systems in coherence with the constitutional history of each state. Instead, it becomes a straitjacket that is tightened to societies with high socio-religious differentiation, internal both to the historical dominant religions and to the new religious presences. It is what Vertovec (2007) called superdiversity and which,

using the approach of social systems theory, I prefer to call the internal differentiation of the various religious sub-systems, which, in turn, contribute to increasing the complexity of the social environment. In Europe, we can no longer speak only of church–state relations, for example, but we must acknowledge that these relations have become more complex due to the fact that the state now faces a series of religious actors who cannot always be homologated to the previous juridical and political infrastructures that mainly regulated the relations with the various Christian churches. Where the new religious actors without central authorities or representative bodies find it natural to give life to forms of federation between the different communities of which a religion is composed, recognition by the state tends to be simpler than those religions that not only do not have a unitary representation but are unable to speak with one voice through an internal federative. As is well known, the problem is acute in the Islam pact due to the structural lack of supreme authority after the prophet’s death. This problem concerns Islam but also other religions, such as Buddhism or Christianity itself, when we look away from Catholicism and toward the differentiated world of the Reformation and Orthodoxy.

Therefore, provocatively one could suggest abandoning the notion of religious minorities. This notion, in fact, from the sociological point of view, implies that there is a religious majority, which perhaps enjoys privileged legal and political treatment by the state. This is still partly true of some nations today in Europe such as Poland (Ramet and Borowik 2017; Topidi 2019) or Slovakia (Zachar-Podolinska et al. 2020), but already if we shift our gaze to other countries with a long Catholic tradition, such as Italy, Spain (Perez-Agote 2012; Cipriani 2020; Garelli 2020), or Eire, the most recent research shows us both a profound internal differentiation and the waning influence of Catholicism in the life of individuals, as well as in many important social spheres.

The scholars (Walzer 2005; Kymlicka 2007; Ruiz Viyetez and Dunbar 2007; Medda-Windischer 2014) who introduced the distinction between old and new minorities have made a correct methodological choice, showing how conceptually it is difficult to reduce to Procrustean bed socio-religious communities very different between them. The longitudinal surveys on the values of Europeans conducted from 1987 to 2017 (Halman et al. 2005; Bréchon and Gauthier 2017) show the extent and depth of socio-religious differentiation between believing and unbelieving, believing independently, believing without belonging, belonging without believing, believing differently, etc. In short, there are so many different ways of believing despite having been born in countries historically influenced by a religion such as Catholicism or by the churches of the Reformation, that the reference to the religion of *birth* appears weaker. The indicators of religious practice and belonging to a church show a steady decline, especially among the new generations (Stolz et al. 2018).

Historical European religions no longer seem able to provide the frameworks of collective memory (Hervieu-Léger 1993; Davie 2000). The signs and symbols of these religions are still largely visible, even if the phenomenon of abandoned churches, transformed into cultural centers or into city churches or given on loan to other religious communities, is growing (Diotallevi 2020; Schlamelcher 2013). It is as if they were part of the *street furniture* and no longer shape collective memory (Halbwachs 1952).

What is happening in the short breath of European history, let’s us say in the last 50 years, under the sacred vaults of religion, is a great, albeit slow and non-linear, transformation of the religious landscape of Europe. The shift of the center of gravity of Christianity from the Old Continent to the Global South (Jenkins 2002) has already happened. A counter-movement in post-colonial European history has begun.

In parallel, thanks to the arrival of many women and men from all over the world (more than 180 different countries), which began after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the religious map of the Old Continent has begun to change. To resurrect a famous phrase by Max Frisch (1965), Swiss architect and writer, commenting on what he saw with the arrival of many Italian immigrants after World War II, “we wanted arms, but we soon realized they were people” and, I can add, even more slowly, we realized that these people had a soul different from the Christian one, in many cases. *Diversity of religious diversities*

characterizes European societies today (Vertovec 2007). It can vary in intensity from one country to another based on the different migratory histories, or the colonial past that each of the countries has known, but the outcome is a religious map punctuated by bell towers, but also by many other signs of many other religious presences. Who could have imagined just 30 years ago that in Italy there would have been 42 Sikh *gurdwaras* in 2020? The average Italian continues to have some difficulty in placing them historically and geographically or, worse, confusing them with Muslims due to the turban that a devout Sikh wears.

From the socio-religious point of view, European societies may appear, metaphorically speaking, to grapple with the famous paradox of Zeno of Elea, that of Achilles and the tortoise. Achilles thinks he is faster and above all stronger than the slow animal and therefore gives it a first advantage at the start. In the time in which the Homeric hero reaches the point from which the tortoise, in turn, had started, this one has moved by marrying forward, as the story goes on. Therefore, he will not be able to reach it and the tortoise will win the race (Aristotle 1936). It is a paradox that Zeno evokes to demonstrate the goodness of the thesis of Parmenides, his teacher, on the illusory nature of movement. If we leave the language of physics and use that of social physics (as August Comte called sociology even before the invention of the name of sociology), the *social movement* of religions is slowly but continuously changing the religious geography of Europe. This process is perceived by a part of European public opinion as a danger of loss of cultural identity and of the spiritual decline of Europe as a whole and not as a new page to be written, largely unpublished.

The discussion on the loss of spiritual (Christian) roots and, more broadly, of European cultural identity started since the draft of the European Constitution from 2000 (the Nice's Treaty) to 2007 (the Lisbon's Treaty). In the beginning, the Catholic bishops raised the issue. In the following years, politicians, intellectuals, and scholars of various ideological backgrounds, believers or non-believers, have multiplied serious arguments to demonstrate the spiritual decline of Europe. It was a sort of collective diagnostic consultation as if Achilles had discovered his weakness: he will soon be defeated by an opponent he has given too many leagues of advantage so far. By opening the doors to migrants, Europeans are realizing what a danger the growing cultural and religious heterogeneity is to their collective identity. In France, the success of Houellebecq's novel, *Soumission* (Houellebecq 2014) can be considered an interesting ethnographic document of Achilles syndrome that seems to have taken over a part of European public opinion. In the social representation that these various voices have come into consideration about the Occident Downfall—paraphrasing Spengler (1923)—Islam occupies a decidedly relevant place. Islam appears in this representation as the white knight of the Apocalypse, who is about to triumph in a land (Europe) that is losing its soul. Out of metaphor, Islam is depicted as a religious minority committed to defeating Christianity, becoming the new dominant religion in Europe.

Islam, a Religious Minority?

The theme of Islam can therefore be considered a useful example for reflecting on the very notion of a religious minority.

As Nazila Ghanea wonders in a recent article (Ghanea 2012): are religious minorities really minorities in Europe? The new migratory religious groups stem from a process that, in principle, does not have much to do with the *r* factor (religion). Other factors count, above all economic and social or, to a lesser extent, political. From this point of view, therefore, speaking of a Muslim invasion of Europe makes no sense. In migrations, it is individuals who move perhaps through word of mouth or migratory chains from family to family or from village to village.

Is European Islam a religious minority? Out of the approximately 20 million people of Muslim faith, according to the estimates by the Pew Research Center (2017), in the European Union, how many are those who refer with a certain frequency to 10 thousand prayer centers (including musallayat and mosques) functioning in Europe (Allievi 2013)? Or how

many feel represented by the various associations that manage these centers? The research carried out in the last 15 years on the socio-religious experience and practices of European Muslims highlights not the existence of a single community but the prevalence of internal differentiation, particularism (up to sectarianism), and competition for representation (Maréchal et al. 2003; Allievi and Nielsen 2003; Maussen 2004; Nielsen et al. 2013; Cesari 2014; Nielsen and Otterbeck 2016; Bowen 2016; Triandafillidou and Modood 2017; Modood 2019).

In the various European societies where the presence of Muslims (many of foreign origin, but the second and third generations are increasing in a significant percentage) is around the European average of 5%, of the total population, the differentiation within the Euro-Islamic world is reflected in the plurality associative acronyms that claim, some more, some less, to represent the majority of Muslims, a theme well known to national governments that have tried in recent years to force Muslims to speak with one voice in the negotiations with the state for the recognition of the rights and duties of Muslim communities.

The variety of solutions adopted by national governments is exemplary from this point of view. In 2017, for example, the Italian state signed an agreement (preliminary to a legally relevant agreement which, however, has yet to come) with the major Muslim associations, after a negotiation that had been sitting around the table of the Ministry of the Interior, the representatives of four associations. On the day scheduled for the signing of the official document, representatives of five other groups showed up, some of which were also unknown to the experts who had supported the Minister in the negotiation. For the first time, the presence of Italian Shiites materialized, mainly made up of a vast Iranian diaspora. The few existing research studies (Saint-Blancat 1999; Mirshahvalad 2020a, 2020b), moreover, have shown how this diaspora did not favor the formation of real religious communities. In many respects, differentiation and individualization in believing and practicing (or not practicing) the faith of birth prevail over the sense of belonging to a Shiite umma in exile. Internal differentiation sometimes translates into competition (for representation) and other times into forms of particularism up to forms of true self-isolation from the rest of society.

The internal differentiation does not only concern Islam but the new socioreligious stratification of European societies as a whole. For instance, looking at the list of new Orthodox parishes, founded after 2000, in some European countries where the demand for care of elderly people is high, we can observe that they represent almost all the main and different autocephalous churches both from East-Central Europe and Africa (from Egypt to Ethiopia). In some cases, they reproduce ancient conflicts reignited recently, such as those that involved Ukraine, in which a part of the population feels represented by the Moscow Patriarchate against another that, instead, is linked to the National Church, to the Patriarchate of Kiev. Similar considerations can be extended to Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches that have taken root in Europe from the Global South. This world presents itself with a multiplicity of faces and voices that make it very difficult to represent it as homogeneous. Even in the case of a community such as that of the Sikhs (significantly present in the UK, Austria, France, Italy, and Spain, respectively), there is a minority of believers (the Ravidassia community) who do not fully recognize themselves in the *Sikh panth* mainstream. In many of these cases, more than religion, socio-economic differences (the survival of the caste system, as in the case of Sikhism, which condemns it in principle), political conflicts (as in the case of Orthodoxy in Ukraine) or, finally, the languages and cultural habits learned according to the geographic areas where one comes from, explain the internal differentiation of the various religious communities that we suppose united by faith. From this point of view, the diversity of religious *diversities* will be the dominant figure in Europe. The Old Continent will be a bit Muslim, Orthodox, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Pentecostal, Catholic, Protestant, and all this with a plurality of voices that will constitute an absolute novelty for Europe. It will be more and more no longer at the center of the world but the world of religions with all internal variants at home.

Coping with such a massive socio-cultural transformation, Europeans have reinvigorated old and new stereotypes and prejudices.

Increasing Xenophobia and Hostility Index

The social sciences have long applied to define and measure how prejudice is formed on the basis of a group that represents itself as homogeneous and dominant in a given society. Therefore, it tends to classify the foreigner (who is not part of the dominant group) according to a scale of the growing intensity of negative stigmatization. This scale depicts the collective perception of the stranger (in a cultural sense) based on the feeling of closeness and distance, sympathy and contempt. It is what has been called ethnocentrism. It measures the three levels of the social perception of the other (or of the groups defined as different from the one to which I belong): the knowledge or the cognitive, emotional, and behaviors that must be held accordingly. The transition from the first to the last level is possible but not necessary. The symbolic violence of ethnic prejudice, in other words, does not necessarily lead to direct and explicit aggressive behavior. However, prejudice tends to make the other be perceived as inferior. The research carried out in 11 cross-national European samples (Scheepers et al. 2002) on religiosity and prejudice shows how the different religious minorities, which today are visible in various European societies, are not all classified in the same way. Some are placed at the top of the prejudice scale (e.g., Buddhism, which according to a widespread stereotype is a *good* religion), others at the bottom, as in the case of Islam (*bad*). This classification does not depend on the degree of adhesion of the interviewees to one of the two presumed majority religions that have historically “made Europe”, Catholicism and Protestantism. Indeed, according to the results of the research just mentioned, a high level of religiosity reduces the propensity to prejudice toward other ethnic and religious minorities.

The research carried out periodically by the European Monitoring Center of Racism and Xenophobia, renamed later into Fundamental Rights Agency (EUMC-FRA 2006), confirms what has just been mentioned. According to these reports, Muslims (European or in Europe?) have been subject to a process of stigmatization by a growing percentage (about one-third) of European citizens. This categorization ranges from recurring as well as ancient stereotypes (which Orientalism has for a long time contributed to fueling) up to the most recent manifestations of hatred toward them (Islamophobia). A turning point in this escalation of negative attitudes was, for the Europeans, the 2005 London bombing (FRA 2012) more than the Twin Towers attack or the Atocha bombing in Madrid in 2004. From that moment on, these negative feelings led to an overestimation of the demographic presence and the actual consistency of a supposed only Muslim community. Muslims have been, and continue to be, disproportionately represented, since, as happens with other new religious communities in Europe, they remain inadequately recorded statistically. Even demographic data relies often on unofficial estimates that vary, sometimes, substantially (Pew Research Center 2017).

As in a game of mirrors, prejudice also increases in those Muslim communities that stand in positions of defense and closure in the society in which they live. The stronger the feeling of exclusivity, the stronger the prejudice against what is outside the community, including those Muslims who appear distant from the alleged authenticity of the pious father of the first Muslim community, as in the case of Salafist groups (Torrekens 2016; FRA 2017; Damir-Geilsdorf and Menzfeld 2020).

Prejudice is actually an individual or group mental prosthesis (Allport 1954), functional to maintaining the social distance from those who are classified so differently from us that they cannot become similar to us. There is no direct correlation between this attitude, which has been extensively studied in the social sciences, and the feeling of hostility we can have toward those who belong to a group of people classified as “too different from us” that are not compatible “with us”. In any society on the prejudice scale, one social group is placed at the top and another at the bottom. Prejudice is a means of communication that tends to reduce cultural, linguistic, and religious differences as concretely experienced

by individuals to a set of median behaviors, which conceal individualities and put them in an abstract social conformism to an ethnic group or religious community, sometimes real *imagined communities* (Anderson 1983). Religious action leads to the standardization of human behavior, but there are always many individual ways of conforming to the standard. The correlation between prejudice and hostility varies in intensity according to the economic, social, and political contingencies. In the contemporary history of Europe, for example, we can conventionally fix some hinge dates from a phase in which the correlation was low-intensity to another in which the prejudice passed from a stage of latency to direct and explicit forms of hostility, in a gradient ranging from symbolic violence to physical violence, from symbolic micro-conflict to organized political mobilization (Collins 2009).

Medda-Windischer (2014) carefully compared three macro-indicators that have been developed by various research groups in Europe to measure the level of hostility toward minorities, including those identified as religious: Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), the Multiculturalism Policy Index (MPI), and the Index on the Framework Convention on National Minorities (EURAC-FCNM). The comparison reveals the strengths and, at the same time, the weaknesses of these indicators. The advantage is the possibility of measuring whether and how the feeling of hostility (generally referring as xenophobia) toward minority groups (old and new) increases or decreases over time. The most striking limit is the difficulty in clearly distinguishing an ethnolinguistic minority from another more markedly religious.

The same problem arises when we read the 2014 Pew Research report (Theodorou 2015) on the hostile attitudes toward religious minorities in Europe. The team of this US research center, in turn, developed a synthetic indicator the Religious Restriction Index (RRI), resulting from a combined weighting of two analytically distinct indicators, the Government Restriction Index (GRI) and the Social Hostile Index (SHI). These indicators distinguish the set of norms (GRI) and the social facts (SHI) that concern religious minorities. While the GRI focuses on government decisions that restrict religious practices or discriminate against certain minority religious groups over others that are recognized, the SHI deals with a range of information concerning concrete discriminatory actions suffered by a minority group or by individuals who, in theory, belong to it. All data and information were collected by administering a questionnaire to a representative sample of the European population. Looking at the final outcomes, apart from the reconfirmation of a relative complementarity between the action of governments and the more or less spontaneous manifestations of hostility that occur in civil society, emerges a general increase between 2007 and 2013 in the Religious Restriction Index in almost all the states of the European Union (including the UK, which was still part of it at the time of the survey), except in Portugal and Slovenia. The countries where the index increased on average by about two percentage points in the period considered are, respectively, Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Romania, and Sweden. The Pew Forum researchers conclude that overall, the RRI indicator in Europe (equal to the value of 2.5 points) is one point above the global median. To have a better idea of what this result means, it is necessary to look carefully at how the questions were formulated. For example, what acts of hostility were directed against religious minorities between 2012 and 2013? If we apply the GRI index, one item used by Pew Research states “Is public preaching limited by any level of government?” or “Is the wearing of religious symbols . . . regulated by law or by any level of government?”. In the case of the SHI index, questions concern, for instance, “Were there crimes, malicious acts or violence motivated by religious hatred or bias?” or “Did violence result from tensions between religious groups?” or “Were individuals assaulted or displaced from their homes in retaliation for religious activities, including preaching and other forms of religious expression, considered offensive or threatening to the majority faith?” In the list of people subjected to harassment, violence, discrimination, and intimidation on the basis of their alleged different minority religious affiliation, the Pew Forum notes that there are essentially two groups, Jews and Muslims. These two groups appear to have suffered acts of hostility of varying intensity in 30 countries around the world respectively.

Numerous examples of manifestations of intolerance and aggression toward Jews and Muslims are reported, particularly in those eight European countries mentioned above.

Anti-Semitism has reemerged and expressed itself in the profanations of Jewish cemeteries or in offensive acts against synagogues, as well as in all those virtual communities formed in the social media that return to evoke the symbols of Nazism. In a recent and valuable study conducted by Sergio Della Pergola (2018) on the perception of anti-Semitism among European Jews in 12 EU member countries, 3 relevant elements emerge. First, a large majority (80%) of the sample (16,395 self-identified Jews, age 16 on over, covered corresponding to 97% of the European Jewish people, a very little ratio of the EU total population, i.e., 0.002%, a little over a million) perceive the increase in prejudice and aggressive actions against the Jewish communities. Second, the more anti-Semitism is widespread in a society, the less the same society perceives prejudice against Jews as a problem. Third, the variance in perceptions by Jews of diffused rhetorical and physical manifestations of hatred toward them, their property, and religious facilities depends statistically on the increase in the general public of negative resurgent stereotypes on the ethnocultural peculiarity and extraneousness of the Jewish communities in and to European mainstream culture. Elaborating data from the Fundamental Right Agency (FRA), Della Pergola shows how the sentiment among Jews of the return of negative stigma toward them ranges from 15% in Denmark to as many as 65% in France. The percentage of Jews who feel negatively labeled is disproportionately high, as in Poland or Hungary, for example, compared to the reduced presence of Jewish communities. In Poland, there are fewer than two thousand people affiliated with the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, and the Hungarian Jewish communities are estimated at between 75,000 and 100,000, one of the largest in East-Central Europe!

The anti-Semitism has increased over the past 20 years, and it is not just a feeling shared by European Jews. According to the latest OSCE-ODIHR report (OSCE-ODIHR 2019), the authors listed, country by country, a series of acts of symbolic and physical violence against Jews. Hate incidents are reported such as attempted arsons, graffiti on synagogues, assaults on persons wearing religious dressings, desecrations of graves (in many cases, in the historical cemeteries), a spike in incidents in relation to the Palestinian-Israel conflict, Shoah anniversary, or neo-Nazi manifestations. If it is trivial to remember that the turning point in the revival of anti-Semitism in Europe occurs immediately after the founding of the State of Israel and the first intense cycle of wars between 1948 and 1973 in Palestinian land, it is not so obvious why the anti-Semitic themes have resurfaced and amplified in and from social media, since these new media have been able to establish themselves as a sort of new public agora with unlimited word sovereignty (Schwarz-Freisel and Reinharz 2017).

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

I deliberately referred to anti-Semitism, because talking about this stereotype's cluster, which has started to grow again in Europe, means more and more questioning ourselves about the growing hostility toward Muslims or Islam in general.

In this regard, it is interesting to reflect on the data and ideas coming from a monographic issue of the *Jewish History Journal*, edited by Jonathan Judaken and Ethan Katz (2018). He is a historian affiliated to the Rhodes College in Memphis, born and raised in South Africa. He lived the double conditions as a member of a religious minority (the Jewish) and, at the same time, of a dominant racial minority (that of whites who imposed the apartheid). Analyzing the narratives that emerged in the immediate wake of the Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Kasher attacks in Paris in January 2015, in the corpus of different hashtags such as #jesuisCharlie, #jesuisjuif, #LassBat, the authors of the issue focused on the recent history of the relationship between Jews and Muslims in France. The main argument is that Judeophobia and Islamophobia are "inextricably entangled in ways more complicated than simple formulas or hashtags can encapsulate" (Judaken and Katz 2018, p. 1). It means that both Jews and Muslims are sharing (at least in France) a feeling of

insecurity and vulnerability. Therefore, it implies for the authors a “recognition of the structural and institutional forces and ideologies that have shaped their interconnected destinies in the last generation” (Judaken and Katz 2018, p. 1). For this reason, the editor of the issue suggests replacing the term anti-Semitism with Judeophobia, synonymous of the fear and fascination about Jews and Judaism, two basic feelings that produced discourses and practices encompassing stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination, racialization, and extermination strategy according to a gradient that moves from a symbolic to physical violence in five distinct historical periods: ancient, early Christian, high Medieval, modern Shoah and post-Shoah.

Islamophobia actually has another history than Judeophobia. The latter, in fact, tells a long and tormented history of Christian Europe toward a minority, the Jewish one, which for many centuries was considered and treated as a foreign body (to be segregated, at best) or as an inferior race (to be eliminated). If we keep in mind what happened in Europe with this historical minority right from the very heart of modernity (Bauman 1989), the analogies with the strengthening of anti-Muslim prejudice in the Old Continent are well founded. The Islamophobia label itself has a much more recent date of birth than the other phobia mentioned by Judaken and Katz (2018). It was first formulated in 1968 by the Runnymede Trust in a report for the British government in which the authors invited it to create a commission to investigate the negative prejudice and early discrimination against Muslims in the UK (Taras 2012; Perocco 2018).

A confirmation of what Judaken claims comes from a recent survey carried out in 2017 by Jeff Diamant (2018) on attitudes toward Jews and Muslims in 15 Western European countries. To the question asked in the sample interview “Would you be willing to accept Jews/Muslims as member of your family?”, 76% agree to welcome a Jew, while this percentage drops by 10 points in the case of a Muslim. By grouping the answers according to the country of the interviewees, five different subgroups emerged, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Attitudes toward Jews and Muslims in Western Europe (acceptance of a Jew or a Muslim into the family in percentage).

Jews	Muslims
+90: Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden	80–89: Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden
80–89: Belgium, Finland	70–79: Belgium, Portugal, Spain
70–79: France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland	60–69: France, Finland, Ireland,
60–69: Austria, Germany, United Kingdom	50–59: Austria, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom
–60: Italy	–50: Italy
Median: 77	Median: 66

What distinguishes the hostility toward Muslims from Judeophobia in Europe is the combination of three powerful prejudices, respectively toward the foreigner (immigrant and clandestine), toward those who belong to a dangerous and violent religion, and, finally, toward those who come from culturally backward societies. The associative sequence (migrant, Muslim, culturally inferior) has reinforced, in no small part of European public opinion, the conviction of the Muslim invasion and the progressive Islamization of Europe. The Islamization has been associated itself both with the increase in the size of Muslim communities (with the visibility of the worship places) and the security fears heightened by *jihadi* terrorist attacks since 2001 (9/11 at the Twin Towers in New York), and then with an impressive sequence of brutal massacres in Europe. From Madrid in 2004 (193 deaths) to the last one in Vienna in November 2020 (4 deaths), almost 50 attacks followed, which resulted in the deaths of 760 people (including the terrorists), plus a much higher

number of injuries. The formation of a revolutionary war movement in the name of Islam (al-Qa'ida, first, later Daesh in conflict with the former), outside and in parallel to the traditional wars between states, has had a considerable weight in creating, especially in Europe, a growing feeling of hostility in a major part of public opinion.

Conclusions

The new century—the third millennium—is dominated, at least in Europe, by the Muslim question, as, by an analogy between the end of the 18th century and the early 20th century, it had been dominated by the Eastern question (Macfie 1996; Schumacher 2014). The difference was that the latter was a geopolitical affair that concerned the lines of development of imperialism of the main European powers, while the Muslim question is an internal affair that concerns the social fabric of the main European societies.

If we look at what has happened in Europe in relation to the presence of Muslim communities, we can align a series of facts and indicators of hostility toward them, according to a gradient of social stigmatization that proceeds from prejudice (“all Muslims are potential terrorists and therefore we must be afraid of Islam”) to social mobilization against some projects for the construction of places of worship (mosques with their minarets), from discriminatory acts against women who wear hijabs to the introduction of rules aimed at limiting the possibility of building new mosques. Finally, in some cases, especially where there is no recognition by the state of Muslim communities, the latter are still considered a religious minority, made up of foreigners, despite the fact that there is at least one new generation, of immigrant origin, born and raised in a European country. In parallel, new political parties were born in Europe that explicitly included in their programs the struggle against what the leaders of these formations call the Islamization of Europe. Since the early 1980s, these parties have established themselves in almost all European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland—in the new way of Front Nationale by Marine Le Pen—Germany, Hungary, Italy—in the new way of the National League inaugurated by Matteo Salvini in 2018—the Netherlands, and Poland). In 2018, a new party (Vox) appeared in Spain too, which explicitly makes contrasting Islamization one of its flagships (Betz and Immerfall 1998; Marzuki et al. 2016; Camus and Lebourg 2017; Diamanti and Lazar 2019). The electoral consensus that each of these formations has gained in the last 10 years ranges from a minimum of 13% (The Finns) up to 27–30% (French National Front and Italian League). Many of these parties have ideologically developed a common repertoire of rhetorical arguments towards Islam. Anti-Semitism, on the other hand, has reappeared in the far-right groups (including neo-Nazis) who sympathize with some of the political parties just mentioned, even if they act autonomously.

In the Old Continent, in fact, thanks to the mobilizing capacity of these parties and the grassroots groups connected to them, only Islamic places of worship are subject to a preventive ban (collections of signatures to prevent construction, request for popular referendums to decide whether to build or not, gestures of disfigurement on the land where they may possibly arise). This is paradoxical, since there are more than ten thousand Muslim places of worship in the European Union (including the UK), a majority of prayer halls (musallaiyat), and in the last five years, new mosques have been inaugurated (especially in France and Germany) according to innovative architectural styles to insert them aesthetically in the urban context. There is no news that in Europe, respectively, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, or Orthodox communities have encountered difficulties in the construction of gurudwara, mandir, pagodas, Orthodox churches, or neo-Buddhist centers.

In conclusion, paraphrasing Olivier Roy (2009, pp. 8–9), the question of religious minorities is reduced if we keep the socio-cultural and linguistic differences of a minority distinct, methodologically, as Ruiz pointed out in this Special Issue of *Religions*, from those that take the form of religious communities, which also seek to exercise in the new social context freedom of religion and worship. In Europe today, there are people who refer to the various, old and new, religious traditions in different ways. The modern principle of individual choice to believe tends to prevail, above all, in the new generations, those

socialized in Catholicism or Protestantism and among the other new communities of faith. Research on new generations of Europeans, respectively, of Muslim, Sikh, and Pentecostal–African matrix indicates that the latter no longer passively accept the faiths of their fathers but tend to redefine the terms of belief and belonging in a new and critical way (Frisina 2011; Crul et al. 2012; Bertolani and Perocco 2013; Voas and Fleischmann 2012; Vilaça et al. 2016; Jacobsen 2018; Singh Ghara and Papparusso 2018). Therefore, it is not so much a question of protecting a (religious) minority but rather of guaranteeing citizens of different religious faiths to be able to freely exercise their own, in compliance with the general rules forced in a state.

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