

Article

Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Anti-Zionism: Discrimination and Political Construction

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Abstract: This article argues that from the end of the 19th century, the debate about anti-Semitism became a marker for a wider dispute focusing on the meaning of national identity. Integrating the Jews into the polity was part, and even a justification, of the Enlightenment political project and of the democratic state. However, while the Jewish question was fundamental for politics and philosophy in the Enlightenment, in our time, as the Enlightenment fades, the Muslim question takes its place. This article argues that the goal of integrating Muslims into the Western democratic polity under a culturally blind, egalitarian and secular type of non-discrimination has proven to be unsuccessful. Moreover, rather than pitting racist nationalists against liberal democrats, it has triggered a “civic confrontation” in liberal political thought, between liberal multiculturalists and supporters of religious freedom who understand, on the one hand, and secular democratic integrationists, on the other.

Keywords: anti-Semitism; Islamophobia; prejudices; nationalism; post-secularism

1. Introduction

More than 80 years after the Holocaust, Jewish communities in Europe are regrettably beginning to feel a renewed sense of insecurity. As Karen Pollock notes, the brutal events perpetrated by Hamas on October 7 serve as a grim reminder that, for some individuals, the perception of Jews as powerless is a condition for acceptance and support. Unfortunately, it appears that even the tragic loss of lives, such as Israeli Jews, does not qualify as powerlessness in the eyes of some (Pollock 2023). For a significant number of Jews around the world, this assertion confirms the rise of anti-Semitism that was already apparent well before the events in Gaza.

Scholars such as R. Wistrich resume the new trend this way: “the very idea of Judeophobia that was once considered the preserve of reactionary clerics, or fascist bigots has undergone a radical mutation in recent years” (Wistrich 2005). Nowadays, the primary purveyors of this hatred are not the fascist right but rather the liberal left.

The contested nature of this perception is evident among thousands of protesters in the Western world, particularly within the accused progressive liberal left. They assert that their criticism of Israel is not driven by anti-Semitism but rather by anti-colonialism. However, their argument surpasses labeling Israel as an apartheid state, falsely depicted as a democracy, and extends to challenging the classification of Jews as a persecuted minority in the Western world. For instance, A. Anidjar argues that “Jews in Western societies are no longer an endangered minority; the Muslims are” (Anidjar 2003).

This presents two interrelated conceptual developments. Firstly, the shift in the perception of the persecuted minority, from well-integrated Jews to marginalized Muslims, signifies the replacement of anti-Semitism with Islamophobia in Western societies. This reflects a fundamental transformation in the nature and target of prejudice and discrimination within Western democratic countries. Secondly, the notion of Jewish self-determination is deemed an intrinsic component of Western colonialism. Consequently, Israel is seen as embodying the historical legacy of Western colonization, which proponents argue should be eliminated.



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Certainly, these two developing perspectives have been evolving over an extended period. However, the recent intensification of the debate, especially in the aftermath of the Gaza war, highlights the urgency and relevance of comprehending the distinctions and interconnections among three prejudices—anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Zionism—that have emerged in distinct contexts and historical periods. Absolutely, delving into the evolving ideological and political motivations behind these three prejudices over time can offer valuable insights into what seems to be more than a regional political conflict—a civilizational clash.

This article acknowledges the deep historical roots of both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. It briefly compares some of their pre-modern origins but then shifts the focus to modern times, particularly the period when global discussions centered around the advancement of liberal rights, religious freedom, and democratic governance.

My initial focus is on intellectual debates in the late 19th century. It primarily investigates the ideological interests and worldviews advocated by those making anti-Semitic claims in comparison to those supporting the inclusion of Jews in the polity. In this historical context, we stress that while in pre democratic times, Jews constituted a theological challenge to Christianity, in modern times, the frequently reference to “Jewish problem” was hardly a religious challenge. However, it served as a central arena for the clash between racist nationalism on the one hand and color-blind secular democratization on the other. The endeavor to integrate Jews into the political body was an integral component of the Enlightenment’s political agenda and the broader democratization and secularization process occurring in Western Europe. Conversely, anti-Judaism served as a rallying narrative for organic nationalists who resisted the notion of a secular democratic state promoting equal citizenship. In this sense, modern democrats defended a secular understanding of democratic integration by integrating the Jews, while organic nationalists, by enhancing their anti-Semitism, attacked democracy and promoted a return of society to its Catholic or ethnic organic bonds.

Subsequently, this article queries the extent to which the historical debate remains pertinent today, particularly concerning the Muslim question. The challenge of integrating Muslims into modern societies using a culturally neutral, egalitarian, and secular approach has encountered complexities and demonstrated inefficacy. This has given rise to a new ideological confrontation within liberal political thought, pitting advocates of diversity and religious freedom against democratic secularists.

Those who uphold the former claim that a successful integration of Muslims into Western European societies is contingent on a shift from a secular to a post-secular society that acknowledges and respects religion as a source of moral values as proposed by Jurgen Habermas ([Habermas 2010](#)). In contrast, the latter group endorses civic integration into a national culture and a principled secular liberalism as the primary means to achieve social cohesion.

This article concludes by posing inquiries about the links connecting the earlier debate and the relatively recent, heated discussion surrounding Zionism and Israel. At first glance, there should be no connection between historical anti-Semitism and contemporary critics of Israel, and there should be no connection between a defense of a post-secular public sphere and advocacy of Hamas actions.

This article contends that these ideological developments are interconnected, viewing them as integral to a new ideological framework. It asserts that promoting a post-secular perspective to accommodate the religious needs of Muslim minorities in Western societies, along with an anti-Zionist post-colonial agenda, are two agendas that mutually complement each other. Both agendas constitute the two ideological pillars shaping a new progressive political program, challenging Western convictions about modes of inclusion, and definitions of racism prevailing since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, the new progressive agenda, challenges traditional Western democratic notions of social integration based on adaptation to a new culture. Second, by substituting Islamophobia for anti-Semitism and placing the Holocaust on the same level as the history of Western colo-

nialism, it questions the West's sense of culpability with the Jewish people, often associated with the Zionist project.

This conceptual development represents a paradigm shift with the intellectual potential to significantly impact the foundations of Western democracies for years to come.

2. Hate the Jew: Fear the Muslim

The roots of both anti-Semitic prejudice and Islamophobia do not trace back solely to the 19th and 20th centuries. According to R. Nirenberg, the 'pathological' fantasies associated with Judaism have deep historical roots within the Western tradition. Elements of Christian teaching and culture utilized criticism of Jews and Judaism as a means to interpret their own religion and society. Conversely, historical interactions between Europe and Islam were characterized by the perception of Islam as an external challenge, involving both intellectual exchange and military conflict.

During the medieval period, for example, European esteem for Muslim scholars and philosophers coexisted with instances of military conflicts, such as the Battle of Tours in 732, where European forces successfully halted the advance of the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate into Western Europe.

Despite these historical differences, scholars like Wendy Brown and Gil Anidjar propose that Islam and Judaism share a common history of exclusion, assimilation, and subjection to state policies of exemption during periods of political crises and threats. Despite Islam often being depicted as an external adversary and Jews seen as a theological internal enemy, both groups, over time, were portrayed as polarized enemies of each other and as common foes of Europe (Anidjar 2003).

As Robert Purkiss adds "one of the similarities between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia is their historical relationship to a Europe perceived as exclusively Christian".¹

This article aligns with the idea that the roots of both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia can be traced to the concept of Christian Europe. However, it particularly underscores how these prejudices have evolved and adapted to their roles in the contemporary secular world. In doing so, this article aims to spotlight the shifting dynamics and implications of these prejudices within the framework of modernity and secularism. To proceed, we rely upon Anne Norton's substantive differentiation between these two types of discrimination during modern times. "If in the past, Western societies had to confront the Jewish problem, nowadays, they have to confront the "Muslim Problem". "The Jewish question was fundamental for politics and philosophy in the Enlightenment. In our time as the Enlightenment fades, the Muslim question takes its place" (Norton 2013). The question persists: What precisely defined the "Jewish problem" in pre-modern times, and how was it purportedly addressed by the Enlightenment? During the medieval period, the Catholic Church, through the issuance of anti-Jewish decrees and blood libel accusations, contributed to the hostile environment for Jews. The dominant perception was that Jews crucified Jesus and their descendent bore hereditary guilt because they have never repudiated it. When the Church became a Gentile movement, Jews became the medium for which Christians define what bad practices are. James Carroll, for instance, proposes that St. Augustine held the belief that Jews should be permitted to survive but not thrive, intending that their public misery would serve as the "proper punishments for their refusal to recognize the truth of the Church's claims" (Carroll 2001). Judaism became 'Anti-Christianity' to the extent that political opponents would accuse rulers of becoming 'Judaized' (Nirenberg 1996). The example of Simon De Montfort who based the righteousness of his rebellion against Henry III of England, in the King's endorsement of Jewish economic activity is a case in point.

However, the impact of the Catholic discriminating approach towards Jews in historical contexts, and how much it led to harassment and affected Jewish life, varied significantly depending on the time and place. In various instances, discrimination was endorsed by ecclesiastic authorities and occasionally monarchs, purportedly to safeguard Jewish life. However, the ultimate result of such discrimination typically led to harassment for the Jewish community.

Papal bulls such as *Cum nimis absurdum* and encyclicals like *Sicut Judaeis*, while ostensibly meant to protect Jews from harm, often reinforced the idea of Jews as religious “others” that should be discriminated, leading in several cases to expulsions and ghettoization. Initially, one might presume that the unfavorable portrayal of Jews was predominantly propagated by Catholics. However, this scenario saw little improvement with the rise of the Reform movement and, in certain instances, even deteriorated, as exemplified in Germany (Sloyan 2007). In the 16th century, individuals such as Martin Luther held the belief that the Jews’ propensity for analytical study could render them more receptive to the Reformed version of the Church. In 1523, Luther seemed open to reaching out to Jews and went as far as stating that Christ was born a Jew. However, his true intention was to depict the Catholic form of Christianity as inferior to Judaism, underscoring its emphasis on the flesh and hypocrisy (Nirenberg 2015). Luther expressed his contempt towards the Jews in his *Against the Sabbatarians* (1538) and *On the Jews and their lies* (1543) in where he defined the Jews as a damned rejected race. These writings contributed to the violent expulsion of Jews from most of the German lands by the 1570s. Paradoxically, many Jews found refuge in Poland, where they were welcomed by noble Poles who admired their commercial skills.

Because of the religious policies of tolerance promoted by kings Sigismund I (1506–1548) and his son Sigismund II Augustus (1548–1572) (Kras 2014, p. 58), a thriving intellectual and communitarian Jewish life developed in Poland in those years. However, a shift occurred after the publication of Pope Clement VIII’s *Bull Cum hebraeorum militia* in 1593, imposing censorship on Hebrew books and condemning the Talmud. Sigismund III’s letter regarding “The Jews Of The Prussian Unfortified City Of Wschowa” reflected this new spirit, resulting in a declaration that the “Jews of Wschowa do not have the right of permanent residence [...] in the city. Neither do they have the right to carry on trade within the city. “This pattern of dependence on the rulers’ goodwill was notably evident in Russia, where a growing Jewish population settled due to Russian westward expansion. Despite tensions between integration and segregation in Russian government policies toward Jews, the outcome was contradictory laws and regulations, notably during the rule of Catherine the Great (1762–1796). Catherine’s legislation allowed communal autonomy and religious institutions while encouraging integration into merchant guilds and legally protecting artisan associations. In 1791, she authorized the establishment of the Pale of Settlement, an area in the western part of the empire, where Jewish subjects were required to reside. The positive or negative aspects of these segregation policies remain a subject of ongoing debate. On the one hand, the Pale Settlement could be seen as the largest ghetto globally, and tsarist legislation could be defined as anti-Semitic, leading to prejudice and state-encouraged pogroms. On the other hand, an alternative view may depict the Russian state’s treatment of Jews as comparable to its treatment of other nationalities in the empire, suggesting that the government’s discrimination was universal and logical for that period.

However, what is not a matter of debate is the act that produced the most sanguine discriminating laws, marking a precedent for Nazi racist policies: the Spanish Inquisition. During that time, we witnessed for the first time the transition of medieval religious anti-Judaism into racial anti-Semitism. The judicial institution of the Inquisition which lasted between 1478 and 1834 enacted “pure blood laws” to determine who was, and who was not Jewish. The reasons for such racial definitions which predated 20th-century racial determinism was the fact that hundreds of thousands of Jews voluntarily converted to Christianity, and even attempted to make religious contributions to their new religion.

Undoubtedly, this represents the closest proximity to the racial discrimination propagated by 19th and 20th-century organic nationalists and later by Nazi Germany. The “new problem” emerged when Western Jews aspired to become equal members of a secular democratic nation, even if it meant relinquishing their own distinctive characteristics. This shift, occurring during the era when Catholic and Protestant Europe underwent secularization, symbolized the moment when anti-Jewish sentiment entered a new phase. The crux of the matter was that a majority of Western Jews embraced the ideals of the Enlightenment and were willing to assimilate, a process thwarted only by a form of racist anti-Semitism.

The question, however, arises whether anti-Muslim sentiment shares a similar background and evolved in a comparable manner. In contrast to the Jewish problem, which originated as a theological issue and later played a role in the progression of secular Europe, the Muslim challenge began as a “foreign civilizational challenge”. It is crucial to note, though, that the interaction between Europe and Islam was not consistently marked by conflict. At the cultural level, both Islam and the West have drawn heavily upon the Greek cultural heritage, and Islamic contributions to the West were not limited to the preservation of the classical Islamic legacy. Cases such as Ibn Kahldum tutoring an Andalusian prince on Plato’s Republic, or the Heliocentric planetary theories that entered the scientific milieu of Copernicus by means of Arabic manuscripts explain volumes about how Muslims influenced the West (Funk and Said 2004, p. 16). Ibn Al-Haytham’s mathematical works are also believed to have influenced those of Roger Bacon, Descartes, Frederick of Fribourg, Kepler and Christiaan Huygens (Al-Rodhan 2012).

What is certain is that when the Arab-Islamic Empire and Christendom coexisted peacefully for many centuries, Islam became Europe’s formidable “Other”. However, this was always challenged by growing fear of Muslims’ imperialist expansionism. In the 8th century CE, the Iberian Peninsula, much of France, and even parts of Italy and Switzerland fell into the hands of invading armies from the Islamic Empire. The Iberian Peninsula, after being invaded, took seven years to become a great Muslim civilization. Its summit was during the 10th century with the Umayyad caliphate of Cordova. Five centuries afterwards, the Ottoman Empire brought Islam into Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and to the gates of Vienna. Muslim communities, remnant of these incursions, can still be found in modern-day Bosnia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Greece (Spektorowski and Elforsy 2020). It is of no doubt that Henry Pirenne’s claim “without Mohammed, Charlemagne would be inconceivable” captures the paradoxical relations of Europe and Islam (Pirenne [1939] 1970; Joppke 2015). However, since 1683, when the (Muslim) Turks retreated from their siege of Vienna, Islam’s long decline was underway. Bernard Lewis in his book *What went Wrong?* emphasizes the deep sense of frustration among Muslims precisely because of the mentioned decline. For centuries, “the world view and self-view of Muslims seemed well-grounded. Islam represented the greatest military power on earth... and then, suddenly, the relationship changed” (Lewis 2002). This is the reason that, according to Martin Kramer, power rather than democracy is the central organizing political concept in Islam. Islam “is the true religion—the religion of God—and its truth is manifested by its power. When Muslims believed, they were powerful” (Kramer 1996). This leads to the conviction that contemporary Islamic revivalism is not an attempt to reject the modern world but an attempt to Islamize modernity (Roxane 1999).

What to do in this regard? One of the arguments against Bernard Lewis is that he has ignored the impact of British and French colonialism on the Muslim world. For critics of Bernard Lewis, the Western world should deal with the legacy of its own transgressions: colonialism and cultural imperialism, before addressing Muslims’ rage (Hirsh 2004). Edward Said in *Orientalism*, for example, emphasized the Western sense of superiority expressed in its cultural imperialism. However, nowadays, it seems that the formula has been reverted. As Adam Shatz notes, “nowadays we have the image of a besieged white defending himself against the invasion of barbarians” (Shatz 2019). Indeed, in current times, Islam is again reshaping Europe’s identity and politics not through invading armies, but through immigration and through a cultural challenge to Western secular identities (Nachmani 2017).

After this brief introduction, the question is whether the histories of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia constituted a shared history of ‘Othering’ that mutually reinforces each other (Katz 2018; Joskowicz 2013). Whether anti-Semitism which consists in transforming Jews into Jews, and Islamophobia which consists in transforming Muslims into Muslims led to similar political results (Klug 2012, p. 678)? As we shall see, both “otherings”, and the way to fight the act of “othering” led in both cases to different and somehow contrasting political projects.

3. The Republic and “Jewish France”: Judaism as Ethnicity nor Religion

A focused examination of modern anti-Semitism and Islamophobia undeniably leads to France. Wendy Brown emphasizes that the integration of Jews into the Republic during this period was conditional upon assimilation. Emancipation, in essence, was intricately linked to the process of assimilation, necessitating a transformation for Jews. To be accepted into the French Republic, Jews had to undergo individualization, denationalization, and de-corporatization, essentially relinquishing their identity as Jews. Despite being granted the freedom to attend religious services and preserve generational continuity, these facets were confined to the realm of private life (Brown 2004). As was remarked by député Clermont-Tonnerre after the French Revolution: “Jews must be refused everything qua nation, and granted everything qua individuals [...] they acquire citizenship individually” (Lochak 1989). The Republic indeed, gave Jews full citizenship, however, it was specified that they were members of the French republic as individuals (Laborde 2008). Jews were requested to take a civic oath in 1791 by whom they renounced “all privileges and exceptions formerly introduced in their favor” as a religious minority.

The lingering question persists: Were Jews willing to pay the cost of embracing this individualistic form of citizenship, entailing the forsaking of their collective identity as a Jewish people? For scholars such as Salo Baron, it ‘is clear that emancipation has not brought the golden age’ for the Jews (Baron 1928, p. 14). Jews in the Middle Ages enjoyed “certain privileges which they no longer have under the modern state. Like other corporations, the Jewish community enjoyed full internal autonomy” (Baron 1928, p. 54). Before emancipation, Jews, “could move freely from place to place with few exceptions, they had their own courts, and were judged according to their own laws” (Baron 1928, p. 52).

Nevertheless, despite Baron’s assertions, the majority of Western Jews were enticed by the promises of the Enlightenment and were, for the most part, prepared to embrace democratic and secular integration into modern states. Wendy Brown clarifies that the overarching aim for European Jews, especially French Jews, was to transition from the periphery of French society to the mainstream.

The embrace of Enlightenment principles, notably the concept of freedom, was evident in the assimilationist Jewish historiography of the 19th century. From this viewpoint, the French Revolution of 1789 was depicted as the “modern Passover”, akin to the second exodus from Egypt. Dominique Schnapper adeptly emphasizes that, under the republican model of assimilation prevalent in many European countries, Jews effectively became true Italians or French citizens. To some observers, this assimilation process reached such a crescendo that it even pitted assimilated Jews against traditionalist Jews. Indeed, assimilated French Jews proudly embraced their identity as French citizens and distanced themselves from the new Jewish immigrants fleeing Eastern European and Russian pogroms. Ironically those “Eastern Jews differently from French assimilated Jews, were above all, considered as too Jewish” (Marrus 1971). However, precisely those Jews who had assimilated, seeking integration into French society by forsaking many of their religious practices and adopting the manners and customs of the non-Jewish population, often became the focal point of concern for French organic nationalists at the late 19th century. This was a view exemplified by the writer Édouard Adolph Drumont in his concept of a *France Juive*. A Jewish France is the consequence of the democratic republican definition of the nation. The question for Drumont and followers was, to paraphrase the discourse of today, how to win the country back? It is not that France was invaded by foreign immigrants. On the contrary, France was infected by people that look like authentic French, but are not. The contraposition to the democratic Republic that included the assimilated Jew is the organic nation. France should return to its Catholic origins or, worse, redefine its national ideology as an ethno-exclusionist nation. This debate expanded across Europe.

Even though France is the place where anti-Semitism developed as an intellectual current, it was in Germany that the concept originated. Wilhelm Marr, an intellectual with strong political conservative leanings and heavily influenced by Johann Gottfried von Herder, is specifically credited with coining the term “anti-Semitism” in 1879. However, it is

crucial to emphasize that Marr departed from Herder in a significant manner. While Herder advocated for the inclusion of Jews and other minorities within the “Christian-German spirit” of the nation through full assimilation, Marr rejected the very idea of assimilating Jews into the nation.

In his pamphlet *Der Sieg Des Judenthums Über Das Germanenthum* (Marr [1879] 2020), he introduced the idea that Germans and Jews were sealed in a non-resolvable conflict with the Germans. The origins of that conflict should be attributed to race—and the paradox is that Marr considered that in that conflict, the Jews were prevailing. This occurred because German liberalism enabled Jews to become significant players in German finance, to the extent of exerting control over both German finance and industry. A similar path was followed by French nationalist intellectuals such as Maurice Barrès, and Charles Maurras, among others. All of them blamed the Republic’s idea of universal citizenship, which allowed the integration of the Jews, while undermining the vital and organic parts of the nation.

Maurice Barrès, a prominent nationalist intellectual of the late 19th century, ardently advocated for organic nationalism. This ideology, expressed in his work “La Terre et les Morts”, not only fueled his anti-Semitism but also endorsed a racial version of anti-Semitism based on the concept of physiological determinism. Similar to Marr, Maurice Barrès believed that Jews were fundamentally different from the rest of the nation, asserting the existence of distinct national characters and ethical values for each nation. According to this perspective, what might be considered objectionable to a Frenchman might not be so for a Jew, and vice versa. This outlook had direct implications for the Dreyfus Affair, contributing to anti-Semitic sentiment and discrimination against Alfred Dreyfus, who was falsely accused and convicted of espionage partly due to his Jewish heritage. Paradoxically, Maurice Barrès concluded the Dreyfus Affair by suggesting that Dreyfus could not receive a fair trial in the context of French justice, contending that Dreyfus was guided by the moral codes of his race. Barrès even argued for Dreyfus’s amnesty because, in his view, “a child of Shem” (a reference to Dreyfus’s Jewish heritage) did not possess the admirable characteristics of the Indo-European race (Todorov 1993). It is better to grant Dreyfus amnesty because it is evident to all that “a child of Shem (does not) possess the fine features of the Indo European race” (Barrès [1902] 1925). Furthermore, as Zeev Sternhell hints, there was also an ideological perspective in Barrès approach. Maurice Barrès knew how to put his social Darwinism and anti-Semitism at the service of his sociopolitical ideology. Indeed, Barrès believed that the inclusion of the proletariat into the national community could be facilitated by presenting the image of the Jew as dishonest and irremediably alien to proletariat daily work. Rejecting clerical anti-Semitism, thus, Barrès focused on anti-Semitism as “a political conception, (whose) task is to fulfill on the flanks of socialism” (Sternhell 1973, p. 57).

This is not to suggest that influential Enlightenment philosophers, such as Voltaire, did not exhibit anti-Semitic undertones in his “Lettres philosophiques” and “Candide”. It is also striking that the reasoning leading to social anti-Semitism was indirectly expanded by Marx in “On the Jewish Question”. Marx identified capitalism with Judaism, and his paradoxical conclusion was that the overthrow of capitalism signifies “the emancipation of mankind from Judaism” (Nirenberg and Walzer 2014).

For Marx, the Jew has already emancipated himself but that was in a ‘Jewish way’, namely by means of acquiring financial power. However, differently from organic nationalists that promoted anti-Semitism in order to rally the proletariat, Marx believed that true Jewish emancipation depended on the proletarian revolution and universal economic emancipation. The striking fact thus is that while Marx and Barrès shared a common criteria, and that was that the Jew “Judaizes” society through capitalism, their conclusions lead to two opposing poles. Marx analysis, rooted in the Enlightenment leads to world revolution and finally to classless society, in which there would be equality between Jews and non-Jews (Peled 1992). Barrès’ conclusions instead, as Sternhell stresses, lead to cultural relativism and next to organic nationalism and racism.

In summary, the “Jewish problem” in Europe follows a intricate historical trajectory, originating as a theological and religious challenge and evolving into a focal point of contention between those advocating for Jewish integration into democratic societies and those adhering to alternative visions of national organization, often rooted in organic or racial ideologies. This tragic confrontation reached its zenith during World War II with the Holocaust, resulting in the systematic persecution and killing of millions of Jews. In contemporary times, a debate arises over whether Jews, traditionally seen as victims due to historical persecutions, could be supplanted by Muslims as the focal point of prejudice and discrimination, as we will examine in the following discussion.

4. Islamophobia: From British-Centered Pluralism to France Laïcité

According to Enzo Traverso, during the post-World War period, we have been witness to the rise of a new type of racism which has abandoned its hierarchical and racist orientation. This was a time in which anti-Semitism underwent a radical decline (Traverso 2016). Concurrently, Islamophobia has become much more prevalent and virulent. Indeed, according to Traverso, the real feature characterizing Western societies today is their growing incapacity to integrate the generations born from the post-colonial wave of immigration, and who have remained excluded and marginalized (Traverso 2016, p. 89). Similar views are held by a wide variety of scholars such as Neer and Modood, and Anthias and Yuval-Davis among others. The main idea is that while racism in modern Europe took a biologist form, nowadays, what is critical to the racialization of a group is not the invocation of a biology but a radical ‘otherness’ (Meer and Modood 2012; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992).

As Bhikhu Parekh stresses, Muslim demands for accommodation have forced Western cultures to face their own arbitrariness. Parekh explains that “in France, the definition of a secular society was challenged by the controversy surrounding the Muslim veil. In the Netherlands, the meaning of permissiveness was also questioned by Islam’s position on the topic of homosexuality. In Great Britain, the Rushdie affair was a type of earthquake which sparked a debate on the features of British public culture” (Parekh 1998). In a complementary vein, Tariq Ramadan claims that Islam “does not have merely the cultural characteristics of a specific population coming from countries outside Europe”. Without “taking into account the religious dimension, all discussions about aspects of Islam in Europe—social and political integration, economic progress or other matters—would be, if not futile, highly inadequate” (Ramadan 2002). Scholars such as Tariq Modood expanded this concept, arguing that the growth of Islam in Europe calls for an expansion of the liberal model to include acceptance of religious values (Modood 2004). In order to achieve this goal, according to Jürgen Habermas we need to transcend the traditional notion of secular reasoning (Habermas 2010, p. 16).

The demand that Islam be accommodated is part and parcel of this post-secular new settlement, including a call to respect Muslim visibility in the public sphere, and acceptance of Sharia as a source of law (Esposito and Mogahed 2007). Scholars critical of European countries rejection of these demands have advanced the concept of Islamophobia to explain Europeans attitude towards their Muslim citizens.

As J. Cesari remarks, Islamophobia first appeared in an essay from 1922 by the Orientalist Étienne Dinet. But it was only in the 1990s that it became common parlance in defining discrimination against Muslims (Cesari 2011). During this period, the religious challenge underwent a transformation into a social issue, notably influenced by Muslim immigration and the emergence of Islamic radicalization. Numerous analysts depict the Islamic challenge in Western secular Europe as orchestrated by either new immigrants or violent Islamists aiming to establish a new Caliphate within Europe. However, the challenge in reality comes from the second and “third generations” of European Muslims, not necessarily violent or radical. While not a homogenous group, most of this new generation of Muslims, some of them professional, and some of them alienated youngsters, have produced through their deeds “innovative, cosmopolitan, and self-critical reformulations of [its] own tradition” (Mandaville 2001). In general terms, “they want to affirm their

Islamic identity within its Western context and through interaction with it, (re)defining and (re)constructing in the process what it means to be British (or any national identity) as well as to be Muslim” (Moll 2007). They reject both assimilationist as well as isolationist approaches towards them. This new generation of Muslim activists advocate and defend a visible Islamic identity within a Western frame of reference. The question is: Why is their aspiration to influence Europe with a synthesis of Islamic sources and multicultural thought rejected? All it takes in order to address what pundits might consider minimum Muslim requests is to readapt the concept of racism to include religious defamation and shift from secularism to post-secularism.

Indeed, as Talal Assad suggests, while modern Westerners criticize Muslim religious fanatics, they are increasingly fanatic in imposing their own restrictions to protect their own ways of life. Rather than defending free speech per se, thus, Westerners are defending a Eurocentric understanding of free speech, one that fits communitarian national ideologies, concealed under universal criteria (Assad 2009).

This shift from neutrality to a national understanding of free speech could be grasped by analyzing the contrasting examples of Great Britain and France; one a centered pluralist ex-Empire and the other a principled secularist country. In both cases, despite structural differences, the challenge of Islam precisely reinforces national identity, and in both cases the combat against racial discrimination comes over religious discrimination. In both cases, gender rights comes over religious minority rights, and in both cases Muslim communitarianism is perceived as cultural and political extremism.

At first glance, as suggested by Modood and Neer, the British settlement of state and religion in where there is freedom of religion but in where the British Anglican Church does not stand in an equal footing to other religions does not affect Muslims negatively. However, despite agreeing with part of this claim, in the last decade, we can detect a clear shift towards a definition of Britishness or British national identity, which is clearly pitted as against Muslim assertiveness.

Such debate was heightened by public and political media discourses by high-profile British MPs of both Labor and Conservative parties. In 2006, the Labor foreign minister Jack Straw, made clear his disrespect for ‘segregated communities’ in reference to Muslim communities in his own constituency of Blackburn (North West England) (Bhopal 2012). At the time, he felt the need to express what are the civic values that should embrace all Britons. “...British nationality is not about blood and soil, but about common civic values. You cannot transmit these ideas without stories. That means freedom through the narrative of the Magna Carta, the civil war, the Bill of Rights, through Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment, the struggle for women’s and workers’ emancipation. . . and. . . the fight against unbridled terror” (Straw 2007). What finds no expression in Straw’s British story is Muslims’ demand and struggle for religious equality and cultural recognition. This omission of cultural recognition is not accidental. Under the concept of Britishness, the idea of women segregation should be delegitimized. Although Straw insisted he did not want to be “prescriptive” of Muslim women’s dress, he asserted that covering facial features was “bound to make better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult.” Straw interpreted fairly the new trend which conceives Britishness as a particularist definition of pluralism promoted from above (Shukra et al. 2004).

In reality, the idea of pluralism from above accentuates a process already in march since the 1970s. Indeed, in 1976, the British Parliament passed the Race Relations Act. The act created the Commission for Racial Equality and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity. This law was a giant step forward for civil rights, but it did not ban discrimination on the basis of religion (Barker 1987). Until 2006, the British Nationality Act only considered incitement to hatred based on racial grounds as an offense. Consequently, courts interpreted the law to provide protection to Jews and Sikhs, recognized as “races”, and even extended it to encompass Christian doctrine. However, Muslims were not classified as a protected race, leaving a gap in legal protections. A wide variety of scholars and activists perceived the shortcomings of these provisions and put forth several initiatives

to remedy the situation; the most important of them was the Runnymede Trust Commission. The report titled *“Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All”* recommended the inclusion of condemnation for religious discrimination within the Race Relations Act of 1976.

The Runnymede report articulated a perspective which was promoted by numerous Western Muslim scholars such as Tariq Ramadan, or American liberals such as Andrew March. Equipped with John Rawls’ ideas in *Political Liberalism*, the main concept advocated by A. March and alike is that a liberal democracy would reject the idea of “imposing a given conception of the good” to other cultures and ideologies”. The way to include Islam is through a Rawlsian overlapping consensus between different concept of the good, in where religious views would not be discriminated (March 2007). The Equality Act of 2010 partially shifted the situation in the direction of the Runnymede committee conclusions. The Equality Act provided “a single, consolidated source of discrimination” law and specified for example that schools “cannot unlawfully discriminate against pupils because of their sex, race, disability, religion or belief or sexual orientation” (Department of Education 2014).

Yet, the practical application of these provisions encountered obstacles in striking a balance between conflicting values. The emphasis was especially on reconciling religious freedom with the advancement of a gender agenda. Equally significant was the conceptual fusion of the gender agenda with de-radicalization efforts, with a particular focus on the Muslim community.

A case in point was the saga around Birmingham’s public school, especially of its east side, which is predominantly Pakistani Muslim.

The controversy started with a letter sent to Birmingham city council alleging that Islamic fundamentalists had conspired to infiltrate governors and councils running public schools in Birmingham in where an important Muslim population live. Indeed, in a previous decade, under the spirit of multiculturalism, British elites promoted the acceptance of more Muslim staff into schools in Muslim-majority parts of Birmingham. However, times had changed, and a new spirit of suspicion invaded British national elites. While it was true that public schools in Birmingham had programs that responded to a growing Muslim attendance, the supposed conspiracy never happened. However, that did not matter for British political elites, because the main concern, as the Ofsted noted, was that some institutions administered curriculums denying evolutionary theory and omitting reproduction from biology classes and segregated girls and boys in classroom and during events. The saga served as an excuse for both Education Secretary Michael Gove and Prime Minister David Cameron to make a case in favor of what could be defined as national education with a common curriculum, stressing women’s rights, and interaction between the sexes.

More importantly, this was connected to the struggle against Islamization. As then-Prime Minister David Cameron remarked, “the reason extremism is flourishing in Britain is because the country has been ‘too bashful’ in promoting its values. As against Muslim clerics denouncing free speech, we should respond with an even more ‘muscular’ defense of ‘British values’ (Walters 2014).

As noted, a new public spirit was rising, emphasizing that stressing British values was essential in the struggle against radicalization. Government programs, such as “Prevent”, are clear examples of how British values are imposed, especially against Muslims. Starting with *Winning hearts and minds* in 2007 and *A Guide for Local Partners in England. Stopping people becoming or supporting terrorists and violent extremists* in 2008 (DCLG 2008), the *Prevent Strategy* of 2011 and the *Prevent Duty* of 2015, an advanced educational strategy, was harshly criticized because it was viewed as stigmatizing Islam. Nowadays, more than ever, de-radicalization efforts are directed primarily against Muslims, grounded in the demand to adhere to a gender agenda. The notion is that while racism is strictly prohibited, religious freedom and cultural pluralism are accepted only within the bounds of a British-centered pluralism.

Another example of the implementation and impact of state-centered pluralism is evident in the ongoing debate on the role of Sharia councils in Britain. This debate began

when the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, suggested the incorporation of certain aspects of *Sharia* law into British law.

To be precise, at the social and legal levels, we were already witnessing a new hybridization “*Angrezi Sharia*”, (or English *Sharia*), implying that while English law is the official law, Muslim law in Britain has become part of the sphere of unofficial law (Pearl and Menski 1998; Samia 2007). It must be stressed, however, that Sharia councils, different from Jewish Beith Din courts, do not adhere to the rule of the 1996 Arbitration Act, which sets forth general baseline parameters for binding extra-judicial arbitration. This would imply the recognition of state involvement in religious matters, something that Muslims reject. Dr. Rowan Williams attempted to correct that situation by promoting a “plural jurisdiction” that would allow Muslims to choose to resolve disputes either in secular or *Sharia* court. A “constructive accommodation” would allow Muslims not to fall into “the stark alternatives of cultural loyalty or state loyalty” (Butt 2008). However, it was precisely Dr. Williams’ intervention that invited a strong backlash. As the Bishop of Rochester, Dr. Michael Nazir-Ali remarked: “English law is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition and our notions of human freedoms derive from that tradition” (Gledhill 2008). An important point in the debate, as could be expected, was the gender-biased discrimination implicit in the *Sharia* ruling, which is incompatible with British law. Even if women consent to trial by *Sharia*, they are still potentially denied justice by *Sharia* rulings (William 2010). Also Muslim women became concerned that privatized religious arbitration would give religious leaders greater power to dictate their behavior (Bano 2008). The result of the saga is that “*Sharia* councils have no legal status and no legal binding authority under civil law. . . in England and Wales. Thus if any decisions or recommendations are made by a *sharia* council that are inconsistent with domestic law (including equality policies such as the Equality Act 2010) domestic law will prevail. *Sharia* councils will be acting illegally should they seek to exclude domestic law” (The Home Department 2018). However, the crucial point opposing Islamic affirmation is that Britain reaffirmed itself as a secular country with a Christian background, where the Bible was presented as the moral framework on which British values and morals depend. The questions then arise: how different is this British settlement of differences with Islam from other radical options advocated by ‘principled secular’ countries such as France? Could it be argued that those options are influenced by Islamophobic feeling?

5. Are Muslims the New Jews? France’s Discrimination between Race and Religion

It is of no question that from a theoretical perspective, Islam’s direct confrontation in Europe is with France’s concept of *laïcité*. One of the clear manifestations of this confrontation was the *hijab* controversy in public schools in 1988. Probably in no other country would an incident that involved three young girls, women from Moroccan and Tunisian origin, who disagreed with the principal’s request to remove their *hijabs* in class, have become an ideological debate. However, for France, that debate symbolized the conflict between respect for freedom of conscience and promotion of freedom of thought, during the year of the Rushdie affair and the year the FIS, the Islamic Salvation Army, was born (Baubérot 2001). A wide variety of reactions followed the controversy. *Le Nouvel Observateur*’s cover story on October 5 entitled “*Fanaticism: The Religious Menace*” marked the tone of the debate (Bowen 2008), and intellectuals such as Elisabeth Badinter, Régis Debray, Alain Finkelkraut, and Catherine Kintzler followed suit, claiming that “in our society, the school is the only institution which is devoted to the universal” (Badinter et al. 1989). They demanded that the Minister of Education ban headscarves. The debate expanded for years, and the Stassi commission, established some years later by the French government, defined its principal goal to deal with the question of how had to apply *laïcité* into a modern environment. From all the recommendations the Stassi committee issued, the French government only took the proposal to ban “ostentatious” religious signs and dress in public schools. The ban, however, did not apply to the Jewish *Kipa* or gold crosses. This decision responded to what can be defined as a secular backlash, translated into a shift towards a nationalist interpretation of *laïcité* directed against Muslim communitarianism (Ahearne 2014).

The nationalist interpretation of *laïcité* was especially perceived in the Republic's attitude towards Fadela Amara, a Muslim woman that has been France's junior Minister for Urban Policy, and who became very popular as a result of her activism against racism. Her struggle for immigrant women's rights led to the founding of the association *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* in January 2002. This was exactly what the Republic expected from a Muslim woman, namely to stand firm against Muslim communitarianism. The 2003 "*Marche des femmes contre le ghetto et pour l'égalité*" set a landmark in French anti-Muslim communitarianism. Immediately after the *hijab* affair, the central question of the debate appeared to be whether an anti-religious comment could be equated with racist utterance. These questions have acquired dramatic significance, especially after the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attacks in 2015. It is important to stress that Muslims do not generally claim, for example, that the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons reflect ethnic contempt for Arab or African Muslims as an oppressed people. Instead, they are making an explicitly religious objection about the treatment of things sacred to their community and faith.

In this context, left progressives viewed Muslims as being essentialized and subjected to discrimination, a trend that intensified notably after the *Charlie Hebdo* incident in 2015. The debate surrounding *Charlie Hebdo* led many, particularly from the Anglo-Saxon world, to distance themselves by adopting the stance of "not *Charlie*". This position is rooted in the belief that the caricatures published by *Charlie Hebdo* essentialize Muslims, constituting an act of racism.

Against this claim indirectly indicting *Charlie Hebdo* for racist offense, critics emphasized that discrimination against Islam as a religion cannot be compared to ideologies that can be held accountable for mass murder. If Muslims had been allegedly murdered for being Muslims, and magazines like *Charlie Hebdo* would laugh about that, then a logical equivalence could be drawn. But nothing of that was at stake. This has led scholars such as J. Herf to claim that radical anti-Semitism leading to the Holocaust cannot on any score be compared with colonial racism. Radical anti-Semites were led by a paranoid will for extermination. Anti-black racists were guided by the will to exploit (Herf 2007). These late conclusions shed light on why the republican state emphasizes the necessity of positive discrimination in favor of Republican values. This was clearly expressed during what is known as the Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala's affair. Dieudonné, a French Muslim stand up comedian, was a popular figure for Muslim disaffected youth at the *banlieues* because of his direct and offensive postures (Dodds 2015). During his early days as a comedian, he campaigned against racism. However, in a show in 2003, he depicted a Jewish settler as a Nazi. He claimed Jews were the big crooks of the planet, denounced the Jewish lobby and, more tragically, labeled the Holocaust as a "dominant religion". In some sense, the Republic confirms that view. To the question whether Dieudonné, no less than *Charlie Hebdo*, had the right to insult or mock the other, the Republic response would favor *Charlie Hebdo*. What Muslims conclude thus is that France's commitment to free speech has never been absolute. For example, the Fabius-Gayssot law of 13 July 1990 determines that it is a crime to "contest" the "crimes against humanity" as defined by the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal of 1945–1946. This law is applied only to expressions of skepticism about real or alleged atrocities against Jews committed by the Nazis and their collaborators. Indeed, France bans Holocaust denial, hate speech and, since November 2015, incitement to terrorism. Under article 421-2-5, the French Criminal Code determines that to "directly provoke acts of terrorism" should be considered an offense. It was under this provision that Dieudonné was charged. Moreover, in some cases, harsh criticism of Israel is also criminalized. Under the Lellouche law, passed in 2003, the already anti-racist laws were extended to targeting specific nations for discriminatory treatment. It became clear for Muslims that not all forms of prejudice are similar. Moreover, do certain prejudices suit the Republic while others do not? The question is whether Dieudonné's demand for a post-colonial type of freedom of speech should be acceptable. This is an incendiary issue. It seems, though, that for the time being, the Republic has advanced an inflexible claim

contrary to post-colonial discourse, and allows us to grasp the meaning of what a French Republican type of ‘democratic discrimination’ is about.

This leads to pungent questions, not addressed specifically to Muslims but to Europe’s secular societies and their relationship with liberalism and cultural pluralism.

The more problematic arguments in Dieudonné defense, however, were advanced by progressive intellectuals. The French sociologist Michel Wieviorka suggested that while attacks against Jews should be condemned, such hate arises “from the logic of the [Muslim] ghetto, a combination of social exclusion and racist discrimination accentuated by a deep sense of being rejected” (Wieviorka 2005). This explanation seems to serve as a justification for Muslim violence against Jews in Europe. It also indirectly justifies the ongoing violence initiated by Hamas against Israel. However, while this approach is endorsed by young progressive activists, the Republic responds through the weaponization of the Lellouche law, designed to combat anti-Semitism, as a tool for prosecuting anti-Israel groups such as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS).

In short, as remarked by French Prime Minister Emanuel Vals already in 2015 “France without Jews is not France”. More and less the same thing would be repeated by most formal political establishments in Europe. However, that would hardly be said regarding Muslims. For Muslims, as well as for post-secularist and post-colonialist activists, that represented a sign of racist discrimination. For the latter, the republican secular paradigm should be changed. It favors Jews and, fundamentally, it favors Israel.

6. The Anti-Zionist Dilemma and the Change in Paradigm

This brings us to the last question; is hostility to Israel and Zionism as expressed by Muslim communities, and especially by liberal and progressive activists, an expression of the old anti-Semitism with a different face, or conversely, is it representative of a stand against racism, as left progressives suggest? This question has become imperative in current days, as the crisis in Gaza is engulfing not only the whole region but has triggered a new phenomenon which has put Jews worldwide, especially liberal Jews, in the defensive. Jews in American and the Western world, even those that opposed to the Israeli government’s occupation of the West Bank, feel desolate. Not only did the Hamas strike trigger existential woes for them, but to add to that, they were taken aback to discover that many of their ideological allies portrayed them as oppressors deserving of blame (Medina and Lerer 2023).

However, long before the attack on Gaza, liberal and left progressives had turned the Zionist question into proof of the permanence of colonialism in post-colonial times. Furthermore, they abandoned the question of anti-Semitism, which was no longer considered a problem, while endorsing Islamophobia as a new case of racism. As Enzo Traverso explains, where Jews were once pariahs, they have now become a fully accepted minority, even of the model kind. For Zionists, the Holocaust has become a civic religion and anti-Semitism is now taboo. Israel, founded in the aftermath of the Holocaust, abuses its memory to justify its uniquely retrograde ethno-nationalism and appalling abuse of the Palestinians. This is extended to diaspora Jews, who over the years have developed an emotional and almost religious tie to Israel (Traverso 2016, p. 90; See also Shain 2020, 2021). This perspective is shared also by a wide number of Jews, something that erases the claim that critiques to Israeli policies and even anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism. More than a decade ago, in 2007, the Independent Jewish Voices group, launched by Harold Pinter, Mark Leigh, Stephen Fry, Zoe Wanamaker, Eric Hobsbawm, and others, was also critical of Israeli policies and especially critical of the charge of anti-Semitism leveled at some of this critique. As the South African Gillian Slovo sums up, “to argue against the injustice of Palestinians being walled into enclaves [...] or to point to parallels with apartheid, is not knee-jerk anti-Semitism or self-hatred” (Karpf et al. 2008). As expounded by Cornel West: “Whatever you call it, apartheid, neo-apartheid, crypto-apartheid, quasi-apartheid, it’s a crime against humanity” (Nelson 2021, p. 18). This gels with Richard Falk concluding with a rhetorical question: “Is it an irresponsible overstatement to associate the treatment of Palestinians with this criminalized Nazi record of collective atrocity? I think not” (Falk 2010). But

beyond a critique of Israeli-specific colonialist policies, what we are witnessing today is an attempt to delegitimize Israel as an ethnocracy. The fact that Israeli Jews comprise a unified 'people' and that an apartheid political structure can also, simultaneously, be a democratic national entity are portrayed as total evil. In this view, the only way to turn it into a liberal democracy is by surpassing Zionism. Following this line of thought, many pundits have arrived at the conclusion that instead of dealing with the Palestinian–Israeli conflict as a national one, it should be portrayed as a question of race relations. Israel, in this sense, should be defined as a racist-apartheid state. This approach fits well into the discriminatory approach against Jewish self-determination developing since the early days of left-wing internationalism. If a Jewish state is understood only as a defense against anti-Semitism, then Jews would perhaps find more security within democratic societies than in the Jewish state. This idea resonates with post-Holocaust political philosophers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Sartre, and Arendt, who rejected anti-Semitism but also rejected Jewish thought in the name of universal values (Lapidot 2020). However, today's progressive scholars and activists also move beyond theories of universal values, while stressing the politics of identities. In this new paradigm, Jewish self-determination is rejected as in the first one. However, far from endorsing a Marxist post-national and post-particularity notion of equality, the new progressive left do not call for the elimination of other existing European nation-states, among them some whose establishment might indeed be linked to ethnic nationalism, ethnic cleansing, settler colonialism and colonial extraction (Bhambra 2021). Furthermore, not only is Israel's colonialism singled out but reactionary Islamism in Europe and the Middle East is accepted as part of the struggle against Western cultural hegemony. This is expressed by the tremendous furor indicting Israel for crimes against humanity in Gaza, which is not followed with a similar condemnation of the barbaric crimes of Hamas. These crimes are somehow "accepted" because they are portrayed as a legitimate rebellion against inhuman occupation. This unnatural defense advanced by progressive liberals of the worst type of reactionary Islamism leads to a growing conviction that this is not only about accepting post-colonial violence but also implies discrimination against Israel, which manipulates the Holocaust to subjugate Palestinian people. This is an attitude which the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) defined as anti-Semitism. The Alliance definition of anti-Semitism that goes back to 2005 lists eleven major forms or examples of contemporary anti-Semitism, including "accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust" and "using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism (e.g., claims of killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis" (Nelson 2021, p. 13). In more senses than one, the IHRA Working Definition, while not restricting the debate about Israel deeds, seeks to define the limits of that debate and that limitation is especially directed against the BDS. As could be expected, progressives considered this definition of anti-Semitism conflating precisely what should be defined as legitimate opposition to Israel's regime of apartheid, colonialism and illegal occupation. This is the background for the crafting of an alternative definition of anti-Semitism, issued in explicit opposition to the IHRA launched in Jerusalem in 2021. While assuming that "anti-Semitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)", it does not see BDS activities as having these characteristics. Item 13 of the Jerusalem Declaration concludes: "Thus even if contentious, it is not anti-Semitic, in and of itself, to compare Israel with other cases, including settler-colonialism or apartheid" (Nelson 2021, *ibid*). Moreover, in order to establish the humanitarian liberal and universalistic feature of the Jerusalem declaration, its signatories add that "we hold that while anti-Semitism has certain distinctive features, the fight against it is inseparable from the overall fight against all forms of racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender discrimination". It must be stressed at the outset that most of the signatories of the Jerusalem Declaration are Zionist.

However, despite this effort that would have placed liberal Zionists and post-colonialists on the same footing, the current war in Gaza led to a clash between them. According to the post-colonialist creed, non-Zionist Jews can perfectly well join a common struggle against

racism together with other discriminated identities. But Zionists, like other racists, by definition could not join that common struggle against racism and discrimination (Flayton 2019). The issue lies not in Israel's colonization but in Israel itself. Consequently, it is apparent that Israel is increasingly identified as the epitome of ongoing Western colonialism. Historically, anti-Semitism was wielded as a weapon against democracy and the notion of enlightened progress. In the contemporary context, Israel, Zionism, and the Holocaust memory are depicted as interconnected instruments furthering Western colonialism in the Middle East. Jews are portrayed not only as elites in secular democracies that discriminate against Muslims but also as instrumental in preserving Western colonialism through the existence of Israel.

Scholars such as Ruth Wodack or Robert Fine, as a wide number of scholars, do not hesitate in claiming that the new anti-Zionist anti-Semitism hardly differs from traditional anti-Semitism (Wodak 2018). In the same vein, Fine claims that "to deny the issue of anti-Semitism on the left on the grounds that the left is inherently anti-racist" is indeed a refusal to engage critically with the legacies of European left (Fine 2009, p. 477). However, while Wodak rightly heeds the aggressiveness of right-wing and extreme-right propaganda which contributes to a general climate which supports hate crimes against all "others" (Wodak 2015), including Jews, I endorse Fine's claim (without diminishing the threat of the Radical Right) that the threat of the progressive left is more damaging. Left-wing discrimination against Zionism, is indeed one of the most damaging discriminating causes in current times, and it could well be defined as close to anti-Semitism.

7. Conclusions: Anti-Racist Discrimination and Democratic Islamophobia in a Post-Secular World

One of the paradoxical conclusions of this article is that the intersection of post-secular and the post-colonial claims constitutes the two pillars through which the struggle against racism and Western colonialism is advanced.

Olivia C. Harrison already perceived this intersection of anti-colonial solidarity and anti-racist activism from the 1970s to the present. In that conjuncture, Harrison claims that the Palestinian question has served as a rallying cry in the struggle for migrant rights in post-colonial France, from the immigrant labor associations of the 1970s and the Beur movements of the 1980s to the militant decolonization groups of the 2000s (Harrison 2023).

This article, however, explains the theoretical and ideological goals and the rationale behind this post-secular and post-colonial agenda.

This formula aims to deconstruct the conventional secular model of democratic integration, which is perceived as discriminatory for neglecting religious specificities. The contention is that the previous secular democratic integration paradigm, once conducive to the assimilation of Jews, no longer aligns with the requirements and expectations of the contemporary marginalized Muslim minority. The second, complementary part of the formula is the necessity of singling out and condemning the Jewish claim to the right of self-determination. The Jewish state, it is argued, militates against the very idea of an open democracy. In addition to its colonial crimes against Palestine, it is Israel's success at legitimizing a democratic grey zone, according to ethno-nationalist assumptions, that is considered anti-democratic for liberal or left-wing progressives. In the name of the struggle against racism and colonialism, Israel must be targeted. Indeed, a new anti-racist anti-Semitism singling out Israel as Western colonialism allows what D. Lipstadt claims that "nowadays it is possible to denigrate the state of Israel...without being blamed of anti-Semitism" (Lipstadt 2019).

In sum, this new conceptual frame allows, first and foremost, the engagement of Western progressives with reactionary religious Islamists, in the name of protecting both cultural and religious rights as Muslims; and second, it allows defying Western governments' silent or active support for the Zionist colonialist state.

Finally, it enables us to understand why Hamas' abuse of Israeli women was not fully condemned by post-colonialist progressives. For them, the overarching struggle against

colonial Israel takes precedence over the universal fight for women's rights. It also sheds light on why, in Europe, progressives can set aside a gender agenda when it conflicts with the dignity of a Muslim religious minority.

I suggest that both approaches symbolize nothing less than a civilizational paradigm shift, which is already changing the character of the ideological confrontation in Western societies.

As a conclusion and as an incentive for future research, attention should be paid to how this intersection of post-colonial and post-secular ideologies is also understood and used by right-wing exclusionists. They see it as a political opportunity to advance their own agenda. The “hundred thousand march” against anti-Semitism taking place in Paris, where the last leader of the France far-right National Rally party participated, constituted for Marine Le Pen an opportunity to transfer the anti-Semitic libel from her party to leftist and Muslims immigrants composing the pro-Palestinian camp (Henley 2023). At the same time, the British hardline Home Secretary Suella Braverman was fired from the British cabinet after making inflammatory comments about the policing of pro-Palestinian protests while labeling the march for Palestinian rights in London, a “march of hate”. Similarly, Florida's Gov. Ron DeSantis' attack of African American studies and post-colonial studies in public schools is of no surprise when it is combined with the strong support for Israel. Gerd Wielders in the Netherlands not only wants to ban Islamic schools, the Qur'an, and mosques, to halt “Islamisation” of the country, but also his support for Israel is almost unconditional.

Undoubtedly, both agendas—anti-Muslim communitarianism and the defense of Israel—are interlinked and emerge as reactions to the “post-secular, post-colonialist formula,” signifying the evolving paradigms of the Left and the Right influenced by progressive post-colonialist activists. While the populist right historically embraced anti-Semitism to undermine democracy, today, they position themselves as champions in the fight against anti-Semitism and proponents of national integration, echoing the liberal ideals of the past. On the contrary, post-colonialists supporting Hamas in current times play a role similar to that of the wide variety of anti-liberal and anti-Marxist intellectuals in the 1930s who supported fascism due to their criticism of liberal hypocrisy and Marxist totalitarianism. In sum, we should stress that the post-secular, post-colonial formula not only encourages Muslim segregation and radical discrimination against Israel, but it also bears similarities to traditional anti-Semitism. Furthermore, its non-moral posture fuels, cleanses, and indirectly legitimizes the populist nationalist reaction in Western societies.

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