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# The Return of Religious Antisemitism?

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Edited by  
Gunther Jikeli

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# **The Return of Religious Antisemitism?**



# The Return of Religious Antisemitism?

Editor

**Gunther Jikeli**

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# Contents

<b>About the Editor</b> . . . . .	<b>vii</b>
<b>Preface by Catherine D. Chatterley</b> . . . . .	<b>ix</b>
<b>Gunther Jikeli</b> Is Religion Coming Back as a Source for Antisemitic Views? Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> <b>2020</b> , <i>11</i> , 255, doi:10.3390/rel11050255 . . . . .	<b>1</b>
<b>Mark Weitzman</b> “One Knows the Tree by the Fruit That It Bears:” Mircea Eliade’s Influence on Current Far-Right Ideology Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> <b>2020</b> , <i>11</i> , 250, doi:10.3390/rel11050250 . . . . .	<b>9</b>
<b>Cary Nelson</b> The Presbyterian Church and Zionism Unsettled: Its Antecedents, and Its Antisemitic Legacy Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> <b>2019</b> , <i>10</i> , 396, doi:10.3390/rel10060396 . . . . .	<b>21</b>
<b>Giovanni Matteo Quer</b> Israel and Zionism in the Eyes of Palestinian Christian Theologians Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> <b>2019</b> , <i>10</i> , 487, doi:10.3390/rel10080487 . . . . .	<b>43</b>
<b>Ildikó Barna and András Kovács</b> Religiosity, Religious Practice, and Antisemitism in Present-Day Hungary Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> <b>2019</b> , <i>10</i> , 527, doi:10.3390/rel10090527 . . . . .	<b>61</b>
<b>Esther Webman</b> Rethinking the Role of Religion in Arab Antisemitic Discourses Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> <b>2019</b> , <i>10</i> , 415, doi:10.3390/rel10070415 . . . . .	<b>77</b>
<b>Daniel Rickenbacher</b> The Centrality of Antisemitism in the Islamic State’s Ideology and Its Connection to Anti-Shiism Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> <b>2019</b> , <i>10</i> , 483, doi:10.3390/rel10080483 . . . . .	<b>93</b>
<b>Navras J. Aafreedi</b> Antisemitism in the Muslim Intellectual Discourse in South Asia Reprinted from: <i>Religions</i> <b>2019</b> , <i>10</i> , 442, doi:10.3390/rel10070442 . . . . .	<b>103</b>



## About the Editor

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## Preface to “The Return of Religious Antisemitism?”

This collection of articles focuses on a wide variety of subjects, involving antisemitism and religion, including three studies of Muslim discourse and four studies related to Christianity. The reader is asked to consider whether religion is returning as a source of antisemitism and if religious motifs play a significant role in the resurgence of antisemitism in this century. In addition to asking whether or not religion is returning as a source of antisemitism, one could also ask why twenty-first century perpetrators of antisemitic violence specifically use religion to both inspire and justify their criminal behavior. It is true that countless attacks perpetrated against Jews by Muslims have involved Islamic beliefs and motivation, while the two recent mass murders in Pittsburgh and Poway were perpetrated by Antisemitism who used Christian anti-Judaism to justify their murderous actions. These two men believed that Jews are orchestrating “the Great Replacement,” a revolutionary project in which the original Christian population is replaced by immigrants and refugees to permanently change the culture of the United States. Similar ideas exist in Western Europe and even more so across the post-Soviet states of Eastern Europe where Christian nationalist identities have established a new presence in public and in politics as a bulwark against a variety of perceived threats, including resurgent left-wing politics, Muslim immigration, EU dominance, and the unrestricted flow of refugees.

There are 2.3 billion Christians in the world today, who make up 31% of the global population, now estimated to be 7.3 billion people. The vast majority of these Christians—almost all, it is fair to say—are busy living their own lives and have little to no interest in Judaism, Jews, Israel, or antisemitism. Two small but prominent exceptions are the American Evangelicals, who are also Christian Zionists and members of organizations, such as Christians United for Israel (CUFI), as well as some members of American, Canadian, and British Protestant congregations. The former group is unique in the Christian world in that they subscribe to their own idiosyncratic understanding of the “end of days,” which places the Jewish people and the state of Israel (particularly Jerusalem) at the center of these apocalyptic events. Their devoted financial and political support for the state of Israel rests on this specific theological understanding, based on the ideas of John Nelson Darby and Cyrus Scofield, which do not exist in other Christian traditions and denominations. While Christian Zionist Evangelicals are a prominent and vocal component of Christian America, it is important to realize that they do not define or represent Christianity in any other region of the world. Members of some Protestant congregations in North America and Great Britain have become engaged in Middle Eastern politics through a Christian lens and advocate for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel in support of the Palestinians. This development is a more recent manifestation of the well-established Social Gospel that flourishes in Protestant churches in which Jesus’ teachings are applied to the social and economic problems of the day. It is also a reaction against—and a repudiation of—the militant Christian Zionism practiced by some Evangelicals in America, which is not scriptural or mainstream in the Christian world. For Christians in general, there is no necessary connection between biblical Israel and the contemporary Jewish state. This is also true, of course, for many secular people, including those who are also Jewish and/or Israeli.

It is important today, as it was in the past, to recognize the distinct roles and experiences of Christian clergy, theologians, and laity. While debates about supersessionism, for example, may be of interest to the first two groups, it is not a dominant concern or common topic of conversation among individual Christians. However, given the unique nature of the historical development of

Christianity out of Judaism, and the understanding of Jesus' ministry as recorded in the Gospels, it is fair to say that supersessionism is inherent in Christianity despite attempts to compromise with it, or invent lighter versions of it as interfaith dialogue proponents have done since the 1960s. Christian attitudes about Jews are hard to gauge with any certainty. We simply do not know how these billions of people feel about Jews, but demography and geography demonstrate quite clearly that only a small minority know any Jews (14.6 million people worldwide) personally. The same is true for Muslims who constitute 24% of the global population (1.8 billion). According to the Pew Research Center, Christians are the most harassed religious group in the world today; harassed in 128 countries by governments or social groups. One wonders how this reality impacts Christian perceptions of religious discrimination and bigotry.

There is no question that antisemitic themes, images, dynamics, and feelings have surfaced in Western societies alongside increasing political hostility toward the state of Israel. The postwar taboos governing public statements about Jews have evaporated and more and more people feel justified in their hostility toward Jews as supporters of a so-called "racist militaristic state." Those few Christians who have become politically engaged in the battle between Israelis and Palestinians face unique pitfalls given the anti-Judaic nature and rhetoric of Christianity born out of the conflict between Judaism and the Jesus Movement as it evolved into a Gentile Church. Politics is a dirty business, and its practitioners will use any and all means to weaken and disable opponents. Harnessing Christian and Islamic anti-Judaism in the political war against Israel is a shrewd tactic and it has been used by people in both camps, though particularly by Islamists, to great effect. However, neither form of anti-Judaism is sufficient on its own. For those who use the full power of Jew-hatred against Jews and Israel, Christian and Islamic anti-Judaism is combined with the antisemitism of modern Europe, including that of Nazi Germany.

The suggestion that antisemitism operates by the neatly arranged stage-theory described in historical overviews of the phenomenon in which religion suddenly and miraculously passes away and is replaced by a rational scientific form of hatred is not convincing. Human beings are more complicated than this and so is historical change. Today, 16% of people worldwide, or 1.2 billion, subscribe to no religion whatsoever. Despite what many people may believe, religion has not passed away and it likely never will, as it is a crucial aspect of human existence and a core component of human consciousness. How religion operates in the lives of individuals, communities, and in public society varies by culture and changes over time, but it always affects attitudes and can motivate behavior. Today this process occurs privately and more covertly, perhaps, than in the past. And this makes it even more challenging for scholars to accurately measure and evaluate attitudes influenced by religion, especially among people who take no action against Jews and do not express their opinions publicly. We certainly have our work cut out for us.

**By Dr. Catherine D. Chatterley**

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Article

# Is Religion Coming Back as a Source for Antisemitic Views?

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**Abstract:** The most violent American and European antisemites in the 21st century, including not only Jihadists but also white (and black) supremacist terrorist, made some reference to religion in their hatred of Jews. This is surprising. Religious antisemitism is often seen as a relic of the past. It is more associated with pre-modern societies where the role of religion was central to the social and political order. However, at the end of the 19th century, animosity against Judaism gave way to nationalistic and racist motives. People such as Wilhelm Marr called themselves antisemites to distinguish themselves from those who despised Jews for religious reasons. Since then, antisemitism has gone through many mutations. However, today, it is not only the actions of extremely violent antisemites who might be an indication that religious antisemitism has come back in new forms. Some churches have been accused of disseminating antisemitic arguments related to ideas of replacement theology in modernized forms and applied to the Jewish State. Others, from the populist nationalist right, seem to use Christianity as an identity marker and thus exclude Jews (and Muslims) from the nation. Do religious motifs play a significant role in the resurgence of antisemitism in the 21st century?

**Keywords:** religious antisemitism; supersessionism; replacement theory; Bowers; Poway; Pittsburgh; Jersey; Black Hebrew Israelites

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Religious antisemitism is often seen as a relic of the past. It is more associated with pre-modern societies where the role of religion was central to the social and political order and where Jewish beliefs and rituals were seen as a problem. Scholars often refer to religious antisemitism as anti-Judaism rather than antisemitism. The latter term was coined only at the end of the 19th century by self-identified antisemites such as Wilhelm Marr. His 1879 pamphlet “Victory of Jewry Over Germanism. Views from a Nonreligious Point of View” is revealing in that shift. Marr called himself an antisemite but denounced “the religious side of this hatred”, which he considered “idiotic” (Marr 1879, p. 7, author’s translation). He explicitly rejected religious accusations, such as blaming Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus. He also said he did not hate Jews. His approach was supposedly rational. He felt resignation in the face of the allegedly powerful and dominating Jewish people who oppressed the Germans.

In a secularized society, religion and feelings of hate were not legitimate arguments anymore to justify polemics and discrimination against Jews. Marr and others proudly called themselves antisemites, but they did not want to be confused with religiously motivated Jew-haters. Now, more than 100 years later, the question of whether religious forms of Jew-hatred are coming back seems anachronistic.

Throughout the history of antisemitism, the most powerful accusations against Jews have been related to the dominant set of ideals in society. In societies where the ideal was to please God and where justifications of socio-political order were dominated by religion, the most powerful accusations were made in the name of God. Jews were accused not only of rejecting the “true message of God” (which is evidently true for those who do not convert), but also of working against God. Popular accusations against Jews in Christian societies have been accusations of being responsible for the betrayal and killing of Jesus Christ; that is, they have been accused of murdering God. Jews have also

been accused of the desecration of Christian rituals and of killing Christian children for their own rituals, the so-called blood libel. Anti-Judaism was widespread to the point that it worked even without Jews. There is a long tradition in Christian societies of accusing adversaries of being Jews or being like Jews because they do not share the beliefs deemed as the truth (Nirenberg 2013). In Islamic societies, popular accusations against Jews have included the claim that Jews have abandoned practicing the true religion and have falsified holy scripture, that they are Muslims' enemies, and that they cannot be trusted.<sup>1</sup>

However, in almost all parts of the world, societies are now organized in nation states. Except for a few theocracies, religious justifications of political order have been replaced by worldviews that place the nation at the center of ideals. The shared dogmas in society have ceased to be religious norms, and morals have been secularized. In this new configuration of nation states, the most powerful accusations against Jews have been made in the name of the nation. Jews are not accused of undermining or trying to kill God, but they are accused of degrading or destroying the nation, or of being disloyal to the nation. The Dreyfus affair in France at the end of the 19th century is the most infamous case in point. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, of Jewish origin, was falsely accused of treason. The ensuing trials and public debates were marred by antisemitic tropes of alleged Jewish disloyalty.

Where the concept of the nation revolves around ethnicity or race, accusations against Jews get a racial spin. Wilhelm Marr and other German antisemites of the 19th century depicted their race being dominated and vanquished by the Jews. The Nazis pushed this racist and conspiratorialist form of antisemitism to the extreme, even if the Nazi antisemitism also drew on non-racist forms of Jew-hatred. Religious justifications had been pushed to the margins in most nation states by the beginning of the 20th century even if they still played an indirect role, providing a cultural code of anti-Jewish sentiments (Volkov 1978).

The defeat of Nazism and the horrors of the Holocaust that became public knowledge after the Second World War have delegitimized racist and nationalistic forms of antisemitism. Today, religious, nationalistic, and racist arguments for Jew-hatred are largely discredited. That does not mean, however, that anti-Jewish sentiments have vanished into thin air, but they must be expressed and justified differently—at least in the public sphere.

Since the Second World War, racism and nationalism in general have been in decline, at least until recently. In the 1990s, some scholars even predicted the end of the nation state and the expansion of international human rights law and norms (Hobsbawm 1990; Ohmae 1995; Sassen 1996). This seems to have been premature (Smith 1995, 2000), but international human rights and the idea of post-nationalism certainly still have appeal. In 2015, Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau, for example, declared Canada to be "the first post-national state" (Lawson 2015).

The era of human rights and post-nationalism might be more of an aspiration rather than reality in many places, but these ideals also have an impact on how people voice antisemitic feelings in socially acceptable terms. One possible avenue is to focus on the Jewish State instead of Jews. Israel is often accused of everything that is in disfavor today: racism, colonialism, and nationalism, an accusation that in itself is not necessarily antisemitic.<sup>2</sup> However, the demonization of Israel as a Nazi-like country, the accusation against Israel of the most heinous crimes against humanity—and by proxy against the Jewish colleagues, neighbors, and classmates who are suspected of supporting the Jewish State—might be an indication that, after the Second World War, "respectable antisemitism" is often voiced in the form of anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism (Améry 1969; Gallner 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Similar to accusations against Jews in Christianity, anti-Jewish accusations have been made with some reference to religion and sacred texts, and parts of the Qu'ran and the Hadith strongly suggest anti-Jewish views (Bostom 2008). However, different interpretations are possible (Fatah 2010).

<sup>2</sup> The differences and similarities between antisemitism and anti-Zionism have been at the center of scholarly debates for decades, see for example the edited volume by Alvin Rosenfeld (Rosenfeld 2019). One of the most outstanding reflections on the issue has been written by British philosopher Bernard Harrison (Harrison 2013).

Be that as it may, this short abstract of the history of antisemitic rationales gives no reason to believe that religious antisemitism should make a comeback. However, still, religion is used to justify hatred against Jews in the 21st century and perhaps not only as a relic, but increasingly so.

The most violent American and European antisemites in the 21st century, at least all of those who murdered Jews for being Jewish, made some reference to religion in their hatred of Jews. Many explicitly justified their action in religious terms. This is true not only for all 17 antisemitic murderers of Jews in Europe in the first 18 years of 21st century, who all made some reference to Islamist ideology, but also for the perpetrator of the most violent antisemitic act in the history of the United States to date, the shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, in October 2018, that left 11 Jews dead, referring to them as “the children of Satan”. The shooter claimed John, verse 8:44, from the New Testament of the Christian Bible, as the source. The terrorist put this prominently into the self-description of his social media account on Gab, where he announced the acts shortly before he went on a killing spree. The antisemitic perpetrator did have a strong white supremacist worldview, but the religious dimension in his demonization of Jews was also prominent. The shooter at the Poway synagogue in California six months later, on 27 April 2019, was even more explicit. He justified the killing of Jews in a “manifesto”, published online in the form of an open letter quoting Bible verses that had been used for centuries to justify hatred against Jews, including the verse that the Pittsburgh terrorist used. Interestingly, he combined white supremacist ideology, seeing the white and European “race” existentially threatened by “international Jewry”, with strong Christian beliefs and Christian antisemitic tropes, such as the blood libel and deicide. Do these old tropes of religious anti-Judaism factor into the current ideology of white supremacists? This is surprising because many of the traditions and influential thinkers of the extreme right and the alt-right denounce Christianity (partly because of its Jewish origins), as Mark Weitzman shows in his paper (<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/5/250>) in this Special Issue on the influence of Mircea Eliade, a well-known scholar of religions, on the far political right. Is there an anti-Christian and also a violent Christian current of white supremacists?

The perpetrators of the second most violent attack against Jews in the United States in the 21st century also seemed to be motivated in part by religious beliefs. David Anderson and Francine Graham killed three Jews in a kosher grocery store in Jersey City, New Jersey, 10 December 2019, after killing a police officer. They both showed sympathy to the Black Hebrew Israelites, a group of antisemitic sects that believe that they are the true descendants of the ancient Israelites and that non-black Jews are imposters, a view that Anderson allegedly expressed on social media. The more radical Black Hebrew Israelites sects believe that Jews deserve only death or slavery (Southern Poverty Law Center 2008). In Monsey, NY, on 28 December 2019, another attacker who had expressed sympathy for the Black Hebrew Israelites attacked a Hanukkah celebration at the home of a Rabbi. He stabbed and injured five people with his machete. The links of violent antisemitic perpetrators to Black Hebrew Israelites’ ideology is another indicator that religious motivations might be a driving force for some of the most radical antisemites today.

However, it is not only the actions of extremely violent antisemites that might be an indication that religious antisemitism has come back in new forms. Some churches have been accused of disseminating antisemitic arguments related to ideas of replacement theology that were prominent in early Christianity. The small, conservative Orthodox Presbyterian Church with about 30,000 members is one of them, as well as the large and relatively progressive Presbyterian Church (USA) with about 1.7 million members.

Has replacement theology or supersessionism gained new relevance today? Replacement theology is the belief that the Church has superseded the Jewish people. “In other words, the nation of Israel, as it existed as the people of God in the Old Testament is no more. [ . . . ] We who trust in Christ are now the nation of Israel!”, as expressed by a minister on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s

website.<sup>3</sup> Replacement theology was the most common response for centuries in Christianity to the theological challenge that the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament clearly refers to a covenant that God has made with the nation of Israel. The idea that “the nation of Israel is no more” delegitimizes Judaism and often had lethal consequences in pre-modern Christian societies. In secular societies, replacement theology is still offensive to Jews and presents a serious obstacle for Jewish–Christian dialogue. However, it cannot be used to justify institutionalized discrimination as it was in the Middle Ages. Moreover, after the Holocaust, most churches have reexamined some of their teachings that had led to anti-Jewish sentiments. The Catholic Church radically changed its doctrines towards Jews following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Its “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” referred positively to the covenant between the Jewish people and God, and it declared that “the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God”, which had often been the result of replacement theology. Pope John Paul II called Jews the “people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked by God”.<sup>4</sup> Catholics still believe in the New Covenant with God that supersedes the Old Covenant, but the New Covenant is not seen as replacing the Old Covenant. Protestant views on the covenant between God and the nation of Israel vary, but there have also been attempts to get away from supersessionism. This seems to be less the case with the Presbyterian Churches and with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in particular.

However, replacement theology, which has become mostly a question of theology and Christian–Jewish dialogue (or an obstacle to it), can gain new political relevance when applied to today’s State of Israel. The idea that the Covenant between God and the Jewish people has ceased to exist and that “the nation of Israel is no more” can lead to political views that are fundamentally hostile to the State of Israel today. Cary Nelson (<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/6/396>) looks at debates within the Presbyterian Church (USA) on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. He shows that there are competing narratives, but the question of the status of the divine covenant with the Jewish people plays an important role, often in twisted ways. The (false) accusation that Zionists see the State of Israel as the fulfillment of the divine covenant is used to delegitimize Israel. This kind of narrative is nurtured by Palestinian liberation theology. Giovanni Matteo Quer (<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/8/487>) takes a closer look at three of its main proponents, Gerjes Sa’ed Khoury, Naim Stifan Ateek, and Mitri Raheb. Quer demonstrates that Zionism and Israel are demonized in political and increasingly in religious terms by Palestinian Christian theologians. The arguments resemble, at times, classical antisemitic stereotypes of Judaism from the (Christian) Middle Ages, such as accusations of a sterile and legalistic religion or its supposedly narrow particularistic interests as opposed to a universalistic Christian approach. In the tradition of Augustine of Hippo, Jews should “not be slayed”, but they should be scattered and relegated to the role of a disempowered minority. Notions of Zionism and Judaism get conflated in theological arguments against the legitimacy of a Jewish State. The portrayal of Israel as a violation of Christian teachings and as a false interpretation of the Jewish Bible is attractive to Christians who look for justifications of anti-Jewish sentiments in the form of anti-Zionism. But only few churches share this kind of rhetoric, and their theology might be determined more by their political views than the other way around.

Additionally, there are some radical, notoriously antisemitic preachers who gained prominence on either TV or radio shows or on social media. In the United States, Rick Wiles, a conservative preacher and founder of TruNews, is a case in point. In November 2019, he said on his show, “That’s the way the Jews work. They are deceivers. They plot. They lie. They do whatever they have to do to accomplish their political agenda. This ‘impeach Trump’ movement is part of a Jew coup, and the American people better wake up to it fast.” (Wiles 2019). However, his rationale seems to be rooted in conspiracy fantasies rather than in his interpretation of religion. Another radical preacher in the

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<sup>3</sup> Website of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Not dated. “Question and Answer. The OPC and national Israel.” [https://opc.org/qa.html?question\\_id=466](https://opc.org/qa.html?question_id=466) (accessed on 27 November 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Author’s translation from German transcript of the speech (Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz n.d., p. 102).



United States, Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, includes more references to religion in his rhetoric but is still very much engaged in conspiracy fantasies. He has alleged that the Jewish people were responsible for the slave trade and that they conspire to control the media, Hollywood, and the government. Yet, Farrakhan also refers to the “Satanic Jews”, and he denies the legitimacy of Judaism, claiming that it is a “deceptive lie” and a “theological error”. Interestingly, this Muslim minister refers to Christian scripture for some of his rants against the “Satanic Jews”.

Surveys show that Christian extremists are identified as major groups of perpetrators in some countries. A 2018 survey revealed that 34% of Jewish respondents in Poland who had become victims of antisemitic acts said that the perpetrator was a Christian extremist. In Hungary, this percentage was 18% (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018). In both countries, “Christian extremists” were named as the second largest group of ethnic, political, or religious groups of alleged perpetrators. The largest group of alleged perpetrators in Hungary was the political right.

However, attitude survey data does not seem sufficient enough to determine if there is a rising trend in religious antisemitism. Ildikó Barna and András Kovács (<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/9/527>) look at surveys in Hungary from 2011 and 2017. They found a slight increase in religious antisemitism as well as of secular antisemitism. However, more interestingly, in 2017, it was not personal religiosity anymore that was a significant factor but religion serving as a cultural identity marker. Barna and Kovács relate this to the rebirth of the “Christian-national” idea in Hungary. Being Christian becomes a cultural-political identity marker of the national-conservative camp where antisemitism is more widespread than in other segments of society. Is this a trend also in other countries? Might it even be a factor—in radicalized form—for the aforementioned Christian white nationalist murderers in the U.S.?

What does Islamic religious antisemitism look like? Surveys show that a solid majority in many predominantly Muslim countries affirm antisemitic statements. However, a closer look at the survey data casts some doubt on whether Islamic beliefs are the only, or even the main, motivating factor for this. It seems that other factors, such as national politics, anti-Israelism, or Arab nationalism, are also at play. In 2009, between 95% and 98% of the population in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon said that they have an unfavorable opinion of Jews, and most have a very unfavorable view (more than 90%). These numbers were somewhat lower in Pakistan (78%) and Indonesia (74%). In Indonesia, however, the negative attitudes were not as strong. “Only” 36% had very unfavorable views of Jews, and 38% had somewhat unfavorable views. In Turkey, negative views of Jews went up from 49% in 2004 to 73% in 2009, which correlates with the rise of Erdogan, a fervent antisemitic leader of that country. In Lebanon, differences between Christians and Muslims are minimal (98% and 97%). By contrast, only 35% of Muslims in Israel had a negative view of Jews, as opposed to 97% in Gaza and the West Bank (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2010).

Four years later, another survey showed that 74% of the population in Middle Eastern and North African countries agreed to at least six out of eleven antisemitic statements. Differences between the countries were large. In all Arab countries, from Morocco to Oman, at least 74% agreed to at least six out of eleven antisemitic phrases. Antisemitic attitudes were somewhat lower in Iran (56%) and Turkey (69%). Numbers were even lower in Indonesia (48%), Bangladesh (32%), and Azerbaijan (37%)—all predominantly Muslim countries. In some countries, there is a strong difference between the Muslim and non-Muslim populations but not in others. In Malaysia, 83% of the Muslim population and 34% of the Buddhist population believe in at least six out of eleven antisemitic statements. The difference is much smaller in India (24% and 20%), and there is no difference between the Christian and Muslim population in Kazakhstan (both 32%) (Anti-Defamation League 2014). In European countries, however, surveys have shown consistently that antisemitic attitudes are significantly more widespread among the Muslim population than among the non-Muslim population (Jikeli 2015). In Germany and France, victims of antisemitism have identified Muslims as the biggest group of perpetrators (among religious, ethnic, and political groups) in different surveys (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018; Zick et al. 2017; Fourquet and Manternach 2016). Muslims in the United States are a small minority, and few surveys have focused on attitudes among Muslim Americans. A survey in the



United States from 2017 found that while 14% of the general American population agreed to at least six out of eleven antisemitic statements, 34% among Muslim respondents did so, which is significantly lower than their co-religionists in European countries ([Anti-Defamation League 2017](#)). However, we need to go beyond survey data to assess whether religion is an escalating factor among Muslims for a revived hatred against Jews.

Esther Webman (<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/7/415>) looks at public discourses in Arab media and the instrumentalization of religion in the Arab–Israeli conflict over the last 90 years. She shows that despite the intensified exploitation of Islam in the incitement against Israel, Zionism, and the Jews, and despite the traditional enmity towards the Jews as a group deriving from Islam, the most common themes in the Arab antisemitic discourse originate from a more modern, exogenous vocabulary and perceptions. Classical Christian–Western tropes, such as conspiracy theories epitomized in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Nazi terminology, and Holocaust denial, are extensively used and are much more pervasive than Islamic influences.

Daniel Rickenbacher (<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/8/483>) on the other hand focuses on Islamists and the Islamic State (ISIS) in particular, drawing on an analysis of one of its propaganda magazines, *Dabiq*. Antisemitism and the belief that Jews are at war against Islam have been central to Islamist ideology since its beginning with the Muslim Brotherhood at the end of the 1920s and Said Qutb’s “Our Struggle with the Jews” ([Qutb 1989](#), first published in or around 1950). Islamists have combined Western conspiracy theories with Islamic traditions or certain interpretations thereof. ISIS has repeatedly targeted Jews in terrorist attacks and incited hatred towards Jews in its propaganda, but it is inconsistent in its acceptance/rejection of Western-inspired antisemitic conspiracy theories. However, one of their main enemies are Shia Muslims, and ISIS claims that the Shia denomination is a Jewish invention to sow disunity among Muslims and that Shia and Jews are working together to destroy Islam.

What does that look like in South Asia, home to one-third of the global Muslim population and some of the greatest Islamic thinkers, as well as intellectual leaders of political Islam and some of the largest Islamist movements? Despite its tiny Jewish community, there were a number of extremely violent acts against Jews and Israelis in the region at the beginning of the 21st century. Navras Aafredi (<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/7/442>) provides an introductory overview of antisemitism in Muslim intellectual discourses in South Asia and its historic origins. Islamic revivalism, which formed the roots of Political Islam in South Asia, were partly a response to experiences of colonialism. Today, antisemitic ideas, including Holocaust denial, are propagated in major news outlets without any objections, and popular Islamic televangelists spread antisemitic ideas. Aafredi finds three prominent themes among leading Islamists in Asia: first, Jewish antagonism against Islam since the advent of the religion; second, the depiction of racism, jealousy, stubbornness, arrogance, treason, and deceit as traits of Jewish character; and third, the accusation of the falsification of sacred texts. In India, however, antisemitism is also part of Hindu extreme right nationalism; “Jews cannot be Indian” is a widespread opinion. However, in conflict with the large Muslim minority (195 million Muslims form about 15% of the Indian population), Jews (and Israel) can be viewed sympathetically because they are perceived as enemies of Muslims. Many Indian Muslims, however, accept religious justification for why Jews should be discriminated against, for example, why Jews should not be elected for political offices if that means that they would have power over Muslims. However, is this rooted in theology or in identity politics?

So, what is the current state of affairs? Is religious antisemitism coming back? Well, at least not in its old, pre-modern forms. Both Christian white supremacists and Muslim jihadists have justified killing of Jews with a combination of conspiracy theories and theological arguments or selected sacred scripture. Christians have put old theological arguments of the New and Old Covenant into a new political context to campaign against Israel—and Jews are often affected by proxy.

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Article

# “One Knows the Tree by the Fruit That It Bears:” Mircea Eliade’s Influence on Current Far-Right Ideology

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**Abstract:** Since the notorious Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017, the alt-right has surged into prominence as the most visible expression of right-wing extremism. While most analysts have focused on the political aspect of the movement, my article will explore the spiritual and religious roots and connections of the movement. In particular, I will focus on how Mircea Eliade, one of the most prominent figures in the academic study of the history of religion in the late 20th century, is viewed by many current extreme right thinkers. Drawing on the writings of some of the leading theoreticians and inspirations of the alt-right such as Julius Evola, Alain de Benoist, Aleksandr Dugin and Richard Spencer, as well as the prominent extreme right publishing houses, Arktos and Counter-Currents, I will show how Eliade’s extremely controversial and problematic past is seen as an intellectual and even spiritual source for these leading figures.

**Keywords:** antisemitism; Eliade; history of religions; traditionalism; alt-right

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Mircea Eliade probably needs no introduction to the readers of this journal. Described as “the father of the history of religions” (Berger 1994, p. 51) in the United States, his prominence reached beyond the academic world and into mainstream culture, and at his death in 1986 the New York Times hailed him in an obituary as “one of the world’s foremost interpreters of spiritual myths and symbolism” (McDowell 1986). Yet since his death, Eliade has perhaps become even more well known for his connection with the violently antisemitic Iron Guard movement in pre-war Romania and during World War II. Eliade had been a prolific propagandist for the Iron Guard and its leader Corneliu Codreanu and his post-war journals continued to give evidence of his sympathies<sup>12</sup>.

The controversy over Eliade’s past exploded when the Romanian émigré writer Norman Manea (1991) published a piece in *The New Republic* that laid out the basic contours of Eliade’s complicity, although some questions had actually surfaced almost two decades earlier.

In 1972, an Israeli journal published a denunciation of Eliade and his activities by a Romanian historian and Holocaust survivor. These accusations led directly to a break between Eliade and the towering scholar of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem. Eliade had met Scholem in 1950 when he first participated in the famous Eranos conference in Switzerland, and a friendship had developed

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<sup>1</sup> In 1937, Eliade asserted “The significance of the revolution to which d. Corneliu Codreanu aspires . . . its success would mean at the same time a victory for the Christian spirit in Europe” (Eliade 1937).

<sup>2</sup> In *Exile’s Odyssey*, vol. II (pp. 65–66) of his autobiography, which covered the years 1937–1960, Eliade described the Iron Guard or Legionary movement as “The only Romanian political movement which took seriously Christianity”. He added that for Codreanu, “the Legionary movement did not constitute a political phenomenon but was in its essence, ethical and religious” and, finally, in regard to his own position “I could not conceive of disassociating myself from my generation (the Iron Guard–MW) in the midst of its oppression, when people were being prosecuted and persecuted unjustly.” (Eliade 1988).

between the two scholars that would end when Eliade could only respond in “an evasive nature” to Scholem’s request for a specific and detailed refutation of the charges<sup>3</sup>.

Since then, much ink has been spilled and many words have been typed on all aspects of Eliade’s career by both defenders and detractors, and there is no need to repeat them all here. Despite the efforts of apologists such as Bryan S. Rennie, David Cave and Mac Linscott Ricketts, the charges made by critics such as Daniel Dubuisson, Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine Robert Ellwood, Adriana Berger, Leon Volovici, Steven Wasserstrom and others have indelibly stained Eliade’s reputation. Yet, up to now, the thrust of both critics and defenders has been to examine Eliade’s immense oeuvre for explicit or implicit fascist or antisemitic tropes. This includes either his personal and professional writings, or what the Romanian born Israeli scholar Moshe Idel (2014) describes as Eliade’s *academica, literaria* and *personalia*<sup>4</sup>. As Elaine Fisher (2010, p. 262) writes

“A recent, well-publicized trend in the critical literature traces the formative influences of Eliade’s ‘eccentric’ scholarship directly to his checkered political history. Already infamous for his alleged associations with the Romanian Iron Guard, Eliade has come under renewed scrutiny not only on account of his methodology or his politics as discrete but objectionable matters. Rather, a veritable cottage industry has emerged, uncovering evidence that Eliade’s academic work in the history of religions is not only methodologically problematical but fundamentally ‘tainted’ by his political associations.”

Fisher then notes that “In their strongest forms, these critiques have tended toward outright polemics at the expense of any pretense to academic objectivity” (pp. 262–63) and targets, among others, Adrianna Berger’s 1994 claim that Eliade’s “dangerously reactionary and conservative ideas . . . resurface not only in the post-Ceausescu Romania but also in the United States today” (p. 71). Thus, Berger and others who wrote in the same vein had extended the critique of Eliade from his professional writings to his perceived influence on extremist discourse.

Twenty-five years later, the question of Eliade’s influence and connection to the extreme right remains open and merits reconsideration. The changes in right-wing extremism have been vast and the discontinuities between past and present manifestations raise significant questions about whether Eliade’s writings resonate in today’s extremist world. In order to answer that question, I surveyed over one hundred extremist sites, articles, interviews and studies for overt acknowledgement of Eliade’s influences. I extracted those that contained substantive references, not just brief citations. Here, I will attempt to show, through a survey of some of the most prominent intellectual figures in the New Right, alt-right and similar movements, that these leaders of the movement have claimed inspiration and support from Eliade’s writings. I not only used postings by individual leaders, but also searched through the two most prominent alt-right publishing houses, Arktos and Counter-Currents. Interestingly, Eliade’s writings that are referenced include not only those from his compromised Romanian past, but also his post-World War II works, including those written in America that brought him high academic and public acclaim. It is important to note that we recognize that a mention does not by itself connote influence; it can mean nothing more than a name being dropped in an attempt to gain some intellectual credibility for a fringe extremist enterprise. Nonetheless, just knowing what name to drop, especially when we consider that Eliade died over thirty years ago, does in itself have a measure of significance and might indicate some lingering influence of Eliade’s thought today.

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<sup>3</sup> Theodore Lavi (1972), *Tik Mircea Eliade* (Heb), *Toladot*, 1:13–18. When Scholem read the charges, he wrote to Eliade directly in an effort to allow Eliade to present a defense of the charges. Eliade’s response was evasive, causing Scholem to write in return that “since you had not been specific about the Jewish point which interested me the most”, your response “left me with a feeling of perplexity” (Scholem 1973). Scholem expressed his disappointment in Eliade’s response in a comment to another scholar, Burton Feldman, who was friendly with both Eliade and Scholem. Feldman wrote to Eliade that “I gather however that Scholem is still puzzled on that especially agonizing charge of antisemitism . . . He seemed to be puzzled by what he feels is a certain “reticence” in your letter about the antisemitism charge” (Feldman 1973).

<sup>4</sup> In this analysis, I have greatly relied on Idel’s perspective on Eliade. I am grateful to my friend, Prof. Felicia Waldman, who drew my attention to Idel’s book.

Our findings show Eliade's presence in two broad categories. The largest number of references were on sites that reflected some attempt at a theoretical or intellectual validation of the extremist position that they articulated. The other category, which I will not discuss here, includes more generic blogs and social media postings that reflect cruder and less intellectually pretentious comments. Generally, on the sites that I reference, Eliade was never really the only or central focus, but usually was cited as an influence or source along with others, although there were some significant exceptions. Perhaps the simplest example of the general importance attached to Eliade in these circles is his inclusion on reading lists for the far right, such as the Essential Rightist Reading List<sup>5</sup>.

One of the most significant connections is that of Eliade and the French theorist Alain de Benoist, often considered the father of the Nouvelle Droite (ND), the French New Right. While the peak of their prominence came decades ago, the legacy of the Nouvelle Droite is strong in today's world. Within the European far right, de Benoist's preeminence is generally acknowledged, as shown by a major publishing house of the movement describing him as "the leading thinker of the European 'New Right' movement, a school of political thought founded in France in 1968" (de Benoist, A n.d.). Further, while the ND flourished decades ago, its influence is still felt. As Tamir Bar-On has written, "Despite the ND's fall from the media and intellectual spotlight in France, ND ideas on immigration, national identity, and the loss of national sovereignty are increasingly accepted by many Europeans" (Bar-On 2016), an assessment that has been borne out by recent surveys and votes. Thus, in his role as the intellectual leader of the ND and following that as Europe's leading right-wing theorist, de Benoist has had and still continues to have a major impact, making Eliade's influence even more relevant.

Bar-On, who has extensively studied the ND and Benoist, and even engaged in a public debate with de Benoist, describes him as "something close to" a fascist, who is trying "to give a very respectable face to the right as a prelude to eventually capturing power" (Political Capital 2018).

De Benoist began editing the journal *Nouvelle Ecole* in 1968 and recruited Eliade as a member of the journal's board of patrons, along with other figures associated with far-right tendencies, including Hans Eysenck, Konrad Lorenz and Armin Moehler (Winston et al. 2001). According to de Benoist, the two even met personally a number of times in Paris (Hakl 2014). In a 2010 article celebrating what would have been the right-wing German writer Ernst Jünger's 110th birthday, de Benoist included Eliade in a short list of thinkers such as Jünger, Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger that he viewed as important and positive figures but whose general reputations were tainted by their associations with Nazism (de Benoist 2010).

It is worth noting that Jünger, Eliade and Schmitt all knew each other personally and had high regard for one another. Eliade visited Schmitt in Berlin in July 1942, and they met again when Schmitt visited Portugal in May 1944 (Eliade 1988)<sup>6</sup>. Jünger, in turn, discussed Eliade with Schmitt during their meeting in Berlin in November 1942. After the war, Jünger and Eliade were coeditors of the journal *Antaios* (1959–1971)<sup>7</sup>. During this period, they published five articles by Evola in the journal. (Junginger 2008).

According to Jünger's (2019) testimony, Schmitt described Rene Guénon, the founder of the traditionalist movement, as Eliade's "mentor,"<sup>8</sup> while Eliade himself acknowledged that he sometimes thought that Guénon was "the most interesting person of our time" (Eliade 2012).

Eliade's connection with Guénon surfaces in many places, but especially important in our context is another article by de de Benoist (2008) that cites "the historical studies of religion by Mircea

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<sup>5</sup> <https://thearetosite.wordpress.com/2017/08/16/essential-reading-list/>. This list appears on multiple postings online.

<sup>6</sup> This account is amplified in Eliade's *Portugal Journey*, pp. 108–9.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Eliade's journal entry of 7 June 1959, where he records a working lunch with Jünger (and another member of the editorial team) regarding the journal. The account appears in Eliade, *No Souvenirs, Journal, 1957–1969*, pp. 42–43. Recently an attempt has been made to restart the journal: <https://gwendolyn-taunton.com/2013/10/22/the-new-antaios-journal-call-for-papers/>.

<sup>8</sup> For the best introduction to traditionalism, see Sedgwick (2004). Sedgwick reviewed Eliade's connection with Guénon on pp. 111–13 as part of his larger discussion on Eliade, fascism and traditionalism, pp. 109–17.

Eliade". This piece by de Benoist is devoted to the thought and influences of Guénon. For de Benoist, traditionalism "is defined as a coherent body of intangible and sacred principles imposed on all which delineates the essential rules of conduct". Thus, traditionalism is important because it teaches that "Clearly stated: the ideology of progress is crumbling . . . The modern world is thus perceived first and foremost as distraction: literally, it diverts man away from the essential." This theme is one that permeates de Benoist's (2013) writings; as he describes it, "Modernity is intrinsically antagonistic to collective identities", and thus it is the past that holds the key to happiness, not the future. Moshe Idel has described Eliade's affinity for this type of thought by writing that Eliade has "a clear propensity to the archaic", in which "the good times are not anticipated in the future but have already flowered in the distant past, and true religion is to be sought in the role of the cyclical return to primordial times" (2013, p. 243). Mark Lilla (2016) has devoted his recent book, *The Shipwrecked Mind: On Political Reaction*, to a discussion of how a number of thinkers have articulated this "political nostalgia" which reflects the belief that a discrete Golden Age existed and that (the believer) possesses esoteric knowledge of why it ended". This combination of esoteric knowledge and reactionary political thought has resurfaced with a powerful impact in today's world and is also reflected in Eliade's influence on current right-wing extremism. While de Benoist is an example of a thinker who provided an erudite framework for extremist theory, Eliade's academic output and scholarly reputation offered strong historical support and the possibility of academic respectability to those who drew upon it.

De Benoist also cited Eliade a number of times in his book, *On Being a Pagan*. He relies on Eliade for the support of his dismissal of Christianity because of its Jewish roots, quoting Eliade who wrote "The characteristic intolerance and fanaticism of the prophets and missionaries of the three monotheist religions have their model and justification in the example set by Yahweh" (de Benoist 2018, p. 112). While de Benoist (2018) feels that Catholicism had once "protected Europe", Eliade saw Christianity, particularly the Western version described as the Judeo-Christian heritage, as having "emptied the cosmos of the sacred" and having "thus neutralized and banalized it" (Eliade 1977, p. 71). Eliade did draw a distinction between Romanian Orthodox Christianity and the Western versions of Christianity, seeing "the simple Romanian peasant as the standard for an authentic form of belief" (Idel 2014, p. 233). Although de Benoist drew on Eliade, it is clear that Eliade, particularly after World War II, was extremely reticent about his personal religious and political thought and preferred to speak as a scholar and researcher. However, it seems apparent from his writings that he retained an affinity for what he described as "cosmic Christianity" and, shortly before his death, he described himself as having a "simple faith" like a "Romanian peasant" (Idel 2014).

An early colleague of de Benoist, Guillaume Faye (who died in March 2019), also showed evidence of Eliade's influence. Faye was one of the founders of the *Nouvelle Droite*, alongside de Benoist, and was an important member of the group associated with de Benoist until he split with them in 1987. After a period away from the movement, he returned with an aggressive anti-Muslim platform in the late 1990s, and then he broke with de Benoist and others in the movement a decade later by taking a positive position regarding Jews and Israel (Faye 2007)<sup>9</sup>. Still, Faye was recognized, in the words of Jared Taylor (2019), the influential US editor of the white nationalist publication *American Renaissance*, as "one of the most important intellectual leaders of the Identitarian movement."

In the conclusion to his 2012 book, *Convergence of Catastrophes*, Faye relies on Eliade's reflections that "Deluge or flood puts an end to an exhausted and sinful humanity, but the disappearance of an entire humanity . . . is never total, for a new humanity is born from a pair of survivors" (Eliade, quoted in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*). Faye is prophesizing that we are at the end of a historical era, a "dead end" that will lead to chaos, and from that destruction will arise a new "race" (in a metaphysical sense not biological) that will create a "new civilization" that is "more stable and ethically higher" (Faye, Guillaume 2012). For Faye, Eliade's work is fundamental to this picture.

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of the criticism that Faye received for this stance, see O'Meara (2011).



Perhaps even more so than de Benoist or Faye, the Russian thinker, Aleksandr Dugin, has expressed overt appreciation of Eliade's work. Dugin is considered the "leader of the Russian New Right and a theoretician of fascism and Eurasianism" (Laruelle 2015, p. 1), the geopolitical theory that Russia must "unlearn the West and reject the imperialism of European unity" (Laruelle 2008, p. 1). Dugin is the most prominent current theorist of this ideology, propagating a version that has been described as "fascistic" (Ibid., p. 2)<sup>10</sup>. Dugin's influence reached, for a time, into the top of Russia's political elite to the extent that he was once even labeled "Putin's Brain" (Barbashin and Thoburn 2014). More recently, he has lost some of the access to the highest levels of policy, but he has remained a prolific and influential voice. His inflammatory rhetoric and extremist positions in regard to Ukraine resulted in his being named to the list of Russians sanctioned by the United States Treasury Department in March, 2015 (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2015). The Canadian government followed suit in June 2015 (Brean 2018).

Dugin, who evinces much more of a religious/spiritual interest than the French thinkers discussed above is explicit about his debt to Eliade. As the Russian scholar Victor Shnirelman (2016) has written, part of Dugin's project can be described as "Building a Bridge between Eschatology, Esotericism and Conspiracy Theory." According to Shnirelman, Dugin shared Eliade's appreciation of Guénon (Dugin's "favorite thinker") and called de Benoist one of his two favorite authors (Ibid., pp. 444–45). In his 2017 book, *Noomakhia: Wars of the Mind—Geosophy: Horizons and Civilizations*, Dugin devoted an entire chapter to Eliade (2017). There, he discusses Eliade as one of the authorities who created the "Large-scale reconstructions of ancient cultures" that Dugin relies upon as the basis of the new society that he is proposing (ibid.). For Dugin, this process is an examination of the "existential category of Dasein (Heidegger) and the multiplicity of cultures and their logoi ... clarifying the identity of each society we examine and the correspondence between this deep identity and the layers presented by each civilization's logos" (Dugin 2017). The similarities between Eliade's work and Dugin's project are clear here. Marlene Laruelle Marlène (2006) notes that Dugin "regularly translates extracts from the works of the great traditionalist theoreticians, René Guénon and Julius Evola, but also from so-called 'soft' traditionalist authors such as Mircea Eliade" (p. 11)<sup>11</sup>. In a talk he gave in 2017 on Russia and Romania, Dugin was even more specific, stating "The entire circle of Romanian intellectuals gathered around the magazine *Zalmoxis* ... the grandeur and depth of intellectualism that Set (sic) themselves a late Eliade and Couliano, they produce such a grand impression that nothing like this is not found in any of the Eastern European countries" (Dugin 2017). A website devoted to Dugin sums it up by pointing out that Dugin "places even more importance on Right-wing thinkers, who clearly form the greater influence on him... the traditionalist School (Evola, Guénon, Schuon, etc.), the New Right (Benoist, Freund, Steuckers, etc.), and the conservative religious scholars (Eliade, Durand, etc.)" (Tudor 2015). As Victor Shnirelman put it (Shnirelman 2016, p. 453) "It is no accident that Dugin highly respects Julius Evola, one of the fathers of European neo-fascism, and is fascinated with another Italian neo-fascist, Claudio Mutti."

Julius Evola (1898–1974), mentioned above, was a friend of Eliade who also features in this conversation. Evola was an idiosyncratic Italian philosopher, fascist and traditionalist thinker who worked for the SS during World War II and became known as the "leading intellectual of neofascism and/or the radical right in all of Europe" (Payne 1996, p. 502)<sup>12</sup>. Eliade and Evola began corresponding

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent and informed journalistic account of this movement, with a great deal of detail on Dugin, see Clover (2016). For a biography of one of the seminal thinkers of Eurasianism in Russia, see Bassin (2016). Both of Laruelle's books as well as Bassin contain a great deal of material on Dugin, while Sedgwick's *Against the Modern World*, pp. 221–37 describes Dugin's traditionalism. However, Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland question the identification of Dugin with traditionalism in their article (2009), pp. 662–78.

<sup>11</sup> However, according to Shekhovtsov and Umland (2009, pp. 671–72), Dugin is not consistent on whether he views Eliade as a traditionalist. Sedgwick (2004, p. 11) defines "soft" traditionalism as "works in which Traditionalism is not overt".

<sup>12</sup> On Evola's thought, see Hansen (2002, pp. 1–104), in Evola (2002), *Men Amongst the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist*. In a 1935 review of the book, originally published in Romanian but now available in English at <https://www.gornahoor.net/?p=4303>, Eliade described Evola as having "one of the most interesting minds of the..



in the late 1920s and met for the first time when Eliade introduced Evola to Cornelius Codreanu, the leader of Romania's antisemitic fascist Iron Guard<sup>13</sup>. Their relationship continued after the war, with exchanges of letters and two meetings in Rome (1955 and 1964) before they broke apart<sup>14</sup>.

Evola's influence did not end with his death; indeed, it had possibly become even more important in far-right circles. Together with Dugin, Evola was actually referenced by Steve Bannon, who led Donald Trump's presidential election campaign and served as a former White House chief strategist, in his notorious Vatican talk of 2014. Bannon, in discussing Vladimir Putin, linked Putin to Eurasianism and said "he's got an adviser who harkens back to Julius Evola and different writers of the early 20th century who are really the supporters of what's called the traditionalist movement, which really eventually metastasized into Italian fascism" (Feder 2016). The advisor Bannon referred to was clearly Dugin.

As is well known, after World War II, Eliade was very circumspect about his pre-war (and wartime) activities and connections. By 1964, Eliade had cut direct communication with Evola and stopped citing Evola's work in his own writings (Bordas 2011, p. 141). One of the possible reasons for this was that Evola, who was unrepentant in his beliefs (describing himself after the war not as a fascist, but as a "superfascist" although he differentiated his beliefs from the cruder Nazi racial theories), did not hesitate to discomfit the Romanian scholar by actually publishing accounts of Eliade's embarrassing past (Ibid., pp. 135, 139–40)<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, in Eliade (1955), Eliade was already working on his first American trip to deliver the Haskel Lectures at the University of Chicago and did not need any revelations that might jeopardize the invitation to the US.

Evola was not the only Italian fascist with a positive relationship with Eliade. Claudio Mutti, described as Evola's "direct intellectual heir" (Laruelle 2015, p. 13), devoted a whole interview to Eliade, which began with whitewashing Eliade's Legionary past in Romania (Claudio Mutti homepage n.d.). Mutti, who later converted to Islam, took the name Omar Amin to honor the Nazi fugitive Johann von Leers who fled to Egypt after World War II (von Leers' Muslim name was also Omar Amin)<sup>16</sup>. Mutti, who runs his own publishing house even published a volume in Italian of the correspondence of Evola and Eliade and also edited a volume for the German far-right Antaios publishing house on the pre-war Romanian right-wing intellectuals including Eliade<sup>17</sup>. Mutti's relationship with Dugin can be traced back at least to 1990, again showing the web of far-right connections that reflected Eliade's influence (Laruelle 2015, p. 38)<sup>18</sup>.

One hallmark of the new radical right includes the international networks that have tied together European and American extremists, with the Americans often turning to Europe for intellectual nourishment and validation. A prominent source for this is the Arktos publishing house, which was founded in 2010 by Daniel Friberg, a Swedish-born activist, originally edited by the American John Morgan, and which has become "the world's largest distributor of far- and alt-right books" (Williams 2017). Richard Spencer has identified himself as an "identitarian", linking himself to the movement that grew up in Europe. (ibid.). Spencer "credited Arktos with having increased intellectually inclined white nationalist Americans access to the French New Right and identitarianism."

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generation." The quote can now be found as the lead blurb in the English edition of the book, published by the far-right Arktos publishing house.

<sup>13</sup> For Eliade's perspective on the early correspondence, see Mircea Eliade, *Journal III, 1970–78*, (Eliade 1989, p. 161). Evola's account of the meeting with Codreanu can be found in his Legionary Asceticism: Colloquium with the Head of the Iron Guard, in Evola (2015), *A Traditionalist Confronts Fascism*, pp. 71–76.

<sup>14</sup> On their post-war relationship, see Liviu Bordas, *Inedited Letters of Julius Evola to Mircea Eliade: The Difficult Encounter in Rome, Mircea Eliade's Post-War Relationship with Julius Evola*, *International Journal on Humanistic Ideology*, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> It should also be mentioned that Evola was also annoyed at what he perceived to be Eliade's refusal to publicly acknowledge his debt to hard-core traditionalist writers such as Guenon.

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of Mutti's career, see Giovanni Savino (2015, pp. 104–17). On Von Leers Nazi past, see Robert Wistrich (2013, pp. 152–53) and Jeffrey Herf (2009, pp. 180–81).

<sup>17</sup> The English announcement of the publication of the volume can be found at <https://www.gornahoor.net/?tag=claudio-mutti>.

<sup>18</sup> Mutti's German volume is listed on the Antaios site at <https://antaiois.de/antaiois-liefert-jedes-buch/3130/mircea-eliade-und-die-eiserne-garde>.

(Teitlebaum 2019, p. 272). Eliade's presence can be found on Arktos in a number of essays that cite him, along with works by Evola, Dugin and de Benoist<sup>19</sup>. For the Americans who look to Eliade's work for validation, his value lies in his excavating and elevating the white European heritage that they feel is the source of Western civilization and culture and is being now devalued and derided by liberal thought.

Arktos' rival publishing house, Counter-Currents, is run by the American white nationalist and antisemite Greg Johnson (Southern Poverty Law Center n.d.). While Arktos included references to Eliade in essays that focused on other topics, Counter-Currents featured Eliade prominently in essays devoted to his work, such as *Mircea Eliade & the Rediscovery of the Sacred* by the French far-right writer Guillaume Durocher (Mircea Eliade 2016). Durocher concludes his appreciation of Eliade by offering the encomium "We salute you Mircea Eliade, Aryan mystic, loyal in a dark age to the faith of your forefathers" (Ibid.). Johnson himself published a short piece "Mircea Eliade, Carl Schmitt, & René Guénon" that explored the connections between the three thinkers as detailed in Eliade's *The Portugal Journal*.

Counter-Currents not only published the extracts described above from Eliade's *Portugal Journal*, but they also published a full English translation of Eliade's preface to his untranslated 1942 book *Salazar and the Revolution in Portugal (Salazar și Revoluția în Portugalia)* (Mircea Eliade 2016). Overall, it can be estimated that Eliade is mentioned over one hundred times on the site.

Johnson is not the only US extremist to acknowledge Eliade's influence. Arktos has also published an anthology of essays by the American intellectual historian Paul Gottfried, who has been called the "Godfather" of the alt-right and might even be responsible for the name of the movement. While Richard Spencer is popularly viewed as its founder, the term actually originated as the title (which Spencer claims credit for) of a 2008 lecture written by Paul Gottfried entitled "Decline and Rise of the Alternative Right" (Gottfried 2008). Spencer and Gottfried were working together at the time at *Taki's Magazine* and, while Gottfried did not use the term in his speech, when it came to publishing the talk on the magazine's website, the headline included the term<sup>20</sup>.

In the Preface to his 2012 anthology (published by Arktos), *War and Democracy*, Gottfried (2012) describes how Eliade and Nietzsche were his primary influences in trying to understand the "apocalyptic temptation" that is the vision of human progress that underlies Western liberal thought today (2013, p. 7). Gottfried's career has been defined in opposition to this tendency, and thus Eliade's thought has provided one of the major inspirations for Gottfried. While not well known outside of extreme conservative circles (much to his own displeasure, Gottfried spent his career far outside of the academic mainstream at a small and little-known college in rural Pennsylvania), his influence in far-right intellectual circles has been great; outside of the contested attribution of the term alt-right, Gottfried has been described by Jared Taylor's white nationalist publication, *American Renaissance*, as "one of the most brilliant intellectuals in America today . . . an intellectual godfather to the so-called Alt-Right . . . (whose) works have certainly proved deeply influential" (Collins 2018). In other words, Gottfried has been successful in putting his own stamp, which is deeply indebted to Eliade's thought, onto a wide swath of the current extremist movement.

Another extremist thinker, the Croatian-American Thomas Sunic, has also drawn on Eliade. Sunic, a former academic, diplomat and translator and an overt antisemite who has hobnobbed with Holocaust deniers cites Eliade (along with many of the thinkers mentioned above) as being among "pagan thinkers [who] usually appeared under the mask of those who styled themselves as "revolutionary conservatives." For Sunic, "All these individuals had in common the will to surpass the legacy of Christian Europe, and all of them yearned to include in their spiritual baggage the world of

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<sup>19</sup> See for example, Kerry Bolton (2018) and Monika Hamilton (2018).

<sup>20</sup> The lecture was given at the annual meeting of the H. L. Mencken Club, 21–23 November 2008 and can be found at <http://www.unz.com/pgottfried/the-decline-and-rise-of-the-alternative-right/>. For a detailed account, see Andrew Marantz (2017). The journalist Jacob Siegel (2016) presents a good portrait of Gottfried.

pre-Christian Celts, Slavs, and Germans." Their success would lead to recognizing that "Christians could never quite reconcile themselves to the fact that they also had to worship the deity of those whom they abhorred in the first place as a deicide people." As a result, Sunic wonders "Might it be that the definite disappearance of anti-Semitism, as well as virulent inter-ethnic hatred, presupposes first the recantation of the Christian belief in universalism?" (Sunic 2012)<sup>21</sup>.

This short survey demonstrates that, almost thirty-five years after his death, Mircea Eliade is unquestionably a figure of some influence in extremist intellectual circles today, perhaps even more so than in respectable academic circles. Thus, his legacy remains contested, with answers to many questions tantalizingly still out of reach. Even if we agree, as I believe, that Eliade was compromised by antisemitism and demonstrated ugly sympathies for the Romanian fascist movement, we still cannot be certain exactly how deeply Eliade was "tainted" in Nancy Harrowitz's (1994) phrase, whether those attitudes persisted after World War II and also after his immigration to the US, or how much they intentionally or unconsciously infiltrated and influenced his writings<sup>22</sup>. Although he was a voluminous writer, much still remains shrouded in mystery. New texts by Eliade, falling into the three categories described by Idel above (*academica, literaria and personalia*) are still being discovered. Further, even the old ones are open to different interpretations and readings, making it extremely difficult to penetrate the fog that lies around Eliade's writings and intent.

In one attempt to evaluate Eliade's work, Moshe Idel has described Eliade's methodology as constructing "stark polarities and ... a historical development of religion that has very little to do with the facts." Further, specifically in reference to Judaism, Idel wrote that Eliade made "no attempt to update his understanding of Judaism as an evolving religion." As a result, "Judaism remained antithetic to the type of religion he [Eliade] forged and disseminated" (Idel 2014, p. 151). Again, we have to judge whether this traditional perspective on Judaism, which often reflected a supersessionist view of Judaism as a "dead" religion, was intentional, based on antisemitism, or incidental, based on methodological weakness<sup>23</sup>.

So, while acknowledging that no author can be held totally responsible for how their words are understood or used after they are published, it is still remarkable how many current extremist intellectuals find some form of inspiration in Eliade's writings. Clearly, there is something in Eliade that resonates with these thinkers and that in turn raises more questions. Are they reading Eliade accurately? Or are they piling their own biases onto the foundation that he laid down? Can those aspects of his work be isolated? Did his students unwittingly absorb some of those aspects of his work? Further, where does that leave the study of the history of religions that he is credited with founding? Is that also tainted? We can isolate some elements of Eliade's thought that the figures surveyed find sympathetic and impactful. For example, Eliade's charge to historians of religions that they work "to advance the understanding of man by recovering, and reestablishing meanings that have been forgotten, discredited, or abolished" (Eliade 1969) can easily be coopted by those who want to restore an archaic world that embraces traditional forms of human inequality and who reject modernity and its associated vices and failings. Further, Eliade's Iron Guard propaganda writings, with their antisemitic and fascist cruxes, also add to his luster in these circles.

Clarity might be difficult to obtain, but that might also be as result of Eliade's own intent. There is one cryptic and tantalizing hint in the correspondence of Eliade and Evola. In a famous letter dated 31 December 1951, Evola, who had challenged Eliade regarding Eliade's refusal to cite by name his traditionalist friends in his academic work as well as Eliade's expunging any public memory of

<sup>21</sup> For more on Sunic, see <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/tomislav-sunic>.

<sup>22</sup> There is a large body of literature that examines and critiques Eliade's work from a variety of perspectives. To give but two examples, on the methodological problems, see Alles (2017); on the methodological issues, and for the political influences in Eliade's scholarly work, see Ellwood (1999).

<sup>23</sup> There are many examples of Judaism being described as a "dead religion" not only linked to theological discourse. It also became a common theme among German philosophers. For Kant, see Robert S. Wistrich (2012, p. 102), n. 15; for Hegel, see David Nirenberg (2013, p. 404); for Schleiermacher, see Leora Batnitzky (2011, p. 26).

his right-wing activities, responded to a letter of Eliade's that presumably contained some defense or explanation.

Evola wrote "As regards your clarifications regarding your relations with academic 'masonry,' I find them somewhat satisfactory. It would therefore be less a question about methodology than pure tactic, and there would be nothing to say against the attempt to introduce any Trojan horse into the university citadel"<sup>24</sup>.

It is entirely unclear what the "Trojan horse" above referred to. Was it traditionalism? Was it antisemitism? Was it Romanian fascism? Was it any combination of the above or something else entirely? Did Eliade actually write to Evola that he was attempting to infiltrate certain controversial ideas into scholarly discourse through his own work, using a method he described as a "Trojan horse"? Was the term even Eliade's or did it originate (in this context) with Evola?

Since we do not possess Eliade's original letter, we remain in the dark about what exactly Evola was reacting to with his "Trojan horse" comment. Yet it might be instructive to point out that Eliade's work has consistently enjoyed a positive reception in far-right circles. As Idel (2014) notes, "Some of the positive reviews (of Eliade's writings) came from people of quite right-wing political positions" (p. 258). Further, it is not only the pre-war Eliade who is cited as an influence, but as one far-right intellectual wrote recently, "But he was nonetheless able to reinvent himself at the University of Chicago and one is left with an unmistakable impression: this man dedicated the rest of his life promoting the history of religions as an apology for spirituality, in effect a crypto-Right traditionalism" (Durocher 2016).

So, while we are left with many unanswered questions, one fact stands out. Today, in certain antisemitic and racist intellectual circles, Mircea Eliade is considered an intellectual mentor and highly important thinker whose writings influence and provide a basis for at least some of their positions. Mark Lilla (2016) has articulated the danger inherent in such a "theological-political approach", writing that "Such myths do nothing but feed a more insidious dream: that political action might help us find our way back to the Road Not Taken" (p. 85). Ultimately, then, we are forced to conclude that if Eliade's work has resonated so strongly with these current antisemitic and far-right thinkers, then it just might be because, as Paul Gottfried remarked about another intellectual "One Knows the Tree by the Fruit that it Bears" (Siegel 2016)<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> An English version of the letter can be found at <https://www.gornahoor.net/?p=4949>.

<sup>25</sup> There, Gottfried was referring to Leo Strauss.

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Article

# The Presbyterian Church and Zionism Unsettled: Its Antecedents, and Its Antisemitic Legacy

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**Abstract:** The new millennium has seen increased hostility to Israel among many progressive constituencies, including several mainline Protestant churches. The evangelical community in the US remains steadfastly Zionist, so overall support for financial aid to Israel remain secure. But the cultural impact of accusations that Israel is a settler colonialist or apartheid regime are nonetheless serious; they are proving sufficient to make support for the Jewish state a political issue for the first time in many decades. Despite a general movement in emphasis from theology to politics in church debate, there remain theological issues at the center of church discussion. The Protestant church with the longest running and most well-funded anti-Zionist constituency is the Presbyterian church in the US. In the last decade, its Israel/Palestine Mission Network (IPMN) has produced several increasingly anti-Zionist books designed to propel divestment resolutions in the church's annual meeting. The most widely debated of these was 2014's *Zionism Unsettled: A Congregational Study Guide*. This essay mounts a detailed analysis and critique of the book which documents the IPMN's steady movement toward antisemitic positions. Among the theological issues underlying debate in Protestant denominations are the status of the divine covenant with the Jewish people, the role that the gift of land has as part of that covenant, and the nature of the characterization of the Jews as a "chosen people". These, and other issues underlying Protestant anti-Zionism, have led to the formation of Presbyterians for Middle East Peace (PFMP), a group, unlike IPMN, that supports a two-state solution. The competing positions these groups have taken are of interest to all who want to track the role that Christian denominations have played in debates about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

**Keywords:** Presbyterian church; Zionism; BDS; chosenness; covenant

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## 1. Introduction: The Prehistory of Recent Presbyterian Debates

The new millennium has seen a dramatic increase in intense hostility to Zionism and the Jewish state, hostility that both in its arguments and in its intensity sometimes crosses a line into antisemitism. Whatever its multiple historical incarnations, Zionism at its core was a movement to establish a homeland for the Jewish people. That core purpose was realized when Israel was founded in 1948, and it rendered many earlier disputes about how to define Zionism moot. It also focused the meaning of anti-Zionism on opposition to Israel's existence. No longer embodying just a theoretical question about the Jewish people's right to political self-determination, anti-Zionism became a challenge to citizens' political rights in an actually-existing Jewish state. Currently, over six million of those citizens are Jews.

Anti-Zionist and antisemitic features of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS), whether widely acknowledged or not, are at least widely debated. But a new religious antisemitism is far less well known outside the relevant Christian denominations. Even there, however, detailed knowledge of denominational anti-Zionism remains mostly within individual denominations, though representatives of anti-Zionist organizations commonly participate in multiple denominations' annual meetings. Finally, the resolutions passed by Methodist, Presbyterian, and other denominations' annual meetings are widely covered by the press, but actual knowledge of key anti-Zionist books by church



activists is relatively little-known. This essay will concentrate on publications by the anti-Zionist wing of the PC (USA), the US Presbyterian church. The essay is part of a book in progress, *Peace and Faith: Christian Churches and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, being edited by myself and Michael Gizzi, which will include an expanded version of the present piece in a cluster of several essays about Presbyterian anti-Zionism, along with discussions of Catholic, Methodist, and Mennonite anti-Zionism, and the relevant history of antisemitism. The book will also address the largest pro-Israel Christian group in the United States, the evangelical community.

In 2014, a voluntary advocacy group within the PC (USA), the anti-Zionist Israel/Palestine Mission Network (IPMN), launched a three-pronged anti-Zionist publication campaign designed to cement opposition to Israel within the church and promote divestment resolutions at its upcoming annual meeting. Described in greater detail below, the 2014 publications at issue comprised two books—*Zionism Unsettled: A Congregational Study Guide*, hereafter *ZU*, and *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*, hereafter *Quest*, along with an elaborate nine-part open access video series. The “study guide” model had been used by the church for nearly fifty years as a way to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though IPMN replaced earlier efforts to raise questions for discussion with a determination to supply answers, answers that arguably cross a line into antisemitism. The publications are part of perhaps the single most extensive anti-Zionist campaign of any among Christian groups in the US. The anti-Zionist campaign within the PC (USA) is certainly the most well-established and also the best funded campaign of those in the Protestant churches. As I will try to show, part of the legacy of the 2014 effort was to prepare the ground for the more overtly antisemitic 2018 IPMN book, *Why Palestine Matters: The Struggle to End Colonialism (Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA))*.

The historical roots of recent Presbyterian debates run deep, since the church has been involved in missionary work in Palestine for over a hundred and fifty years. While the church never succeeded in converting Muslims, it did become part of Arab culture and in time allied itself with anti-colonialism in the region. As Fishman (1973) writes, “Because the (American Protestant) missionaries provided political support for the Arab cause, they inevitably became opponents of Jewish nationalism in Palestine”. They “invariably supported the battle against Zionism” (p. 179), and the Presbyterians as a consequence were often referred to as a pro-Arab church. Yet opposing views then and now continue to divide the denomination.

As Hopkins (1990) points out, a split developed between the missionaries (now called “fraternal workers”) and those Presbyterian leaders in the US who were focused on interfaith alliances with the Jewish community, alliances that were strengthened by relationships built on shared commitments to the civil rights movement and to anti-Vietnam protest. The divisions were exacerbated in the wake of the 1967 war and the emergence of the occupation as an issue.

A report presented by a Middle East Task Force to the PC (USA) meeting in 1972, “Peoples and Conflict in the Middle East”, confirmed that “the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional in that it is not based on the prior acts of the people nor can it be invalidated by any sin of the people” (p. 32), theological positions that IPMN decades later would explicitly reject. Indeed, the report emphasizes the contemporary connection: “the current state of Israel may be viewed as a sign of the continuing relationship of God with the Jewish people”. Past efforts to claim the covenant was broken, it adds, are evidence of antisemitism within the church. At the same time, the report declares what remains true about the West Bank: “Palestinians do not enjoy rights in any degree consistent with modern political standards” (p. 42).

Two years later the balance had shifted only modestly. The Task Force’s 1974 88-page report, “The Middle East Conflict”, for the first time recognized a Palestinian right to self-determination and reformulated the church’s reasoning behind the centrality of reconciliation: “To ignore injustices that have been commonplace is not reconciliation. A people ‘reconciled’ to its own suffering and humiliation is not truly reconciled” (p. 8).

But events were leading the church to add criticism of Israel to its balanced commitments to political goals. The mid-1970s saw a settler movement evolve in the West Bank. The Palestine Liberation Organization meanwhile, was succeeding in building political self-identification among the refugees. Then, in 1988, the annual meeting of the church reacted to the First Intifada by urging Israel to “cease the systematic violation of human rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories”. A line had been crossed.

One significant consequence of the emerging dominant leadership view, despite widespread pro-Zionist sentiment among the Presbyterian laity, was the eventual election of anti-Zionist members as moderator, head of the denomination’s policy-setting annual meeting, its General Assembly. In 2002, in the wake of two events—the World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa, that promoted the “Zionism is Racism” thesis, and the Second Intifada—an intensely anti-Zionist Palestinian, Fahed Abu-Akel, was appointed moderator. That helped lead to passage of a 2003 resolution calling on Israel to *End the Occupation Now*. At the following year’s General Assembly, the anti-Israel forces coalesced, established the IPMN, and pushed forward a divestment resolution. In response, Presbyterians who support the existence of a Jewish state came together to found Presbyterians for Middle East Peace (PFMEP), a group that was fully organized and functioning prior to the 2008 General Assembly.

## 2. Zionism Unsettled and the 2014 General Assembly Meeting

The presence of two competing groups—IPMN and PFMEP—made for a notably contentious meeting in June 2014. Nonetheless, the IPMN forces were able to impose one-sided procedures that blocked open debate and promoted their anti-Zionist agenda. They succeeded in passing a resolution by a vote of 310–303 to divest from Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, and Hewlett-Packard, companies the PC (USA) deemed complicit in and profiting from Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza. In response, more than 40 Commissioners to and Observers of the PCUSA’s General Assembly signed *Reformed and Reforming: A Word of Hope*, a pamphlet decrying unfair and one-sided procedures at the 2014 meeting ([Commissioners to and Observers of the 221st General Assembly of the PC \(USA\)](#)). The debate, they conclude, “in essence has become within the PC (USA) a Middle East war of proxy over the last decade” (p. 6) in which “the denomination’s historic commitment to fair and open debate of crucial issues” has been set aside (p. 15).

A number of outside groups and speakers had a major impact on the PC (USA) process. BDS activist Dalit Baum, who is director of the American Friends Service Committee’s Economic Activism Program, helped the PC (USA) justify divestment. Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and Sabeel were active at the meeting. The connection with the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in East Jerusalem is particularly significant because Friends of Sabeel North America, one of its many national chapters, collaborates with IPMN on its publications. Founded by Anglican priest Naim Ateek in 1989, Sabeel has promoted a version of supersessionism—the belief that Christianity replaced or invalidated, thereby “superceded” the special relationship between the Jews and god—that is linked with Palestinian liberation politics.<sup>1</sup> Ateek writes widely on Palestinian Liberation Theology and

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<sup>1</sup> What is arguably the first supersessionist text, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, was composed about 132 CE. The Epistle, which ultimately was not included in the canon of the New Testament, asserts that Christians are the only true covenant people and that the Jewish covenant with God has ended. Though not yet named, supersessionism, the logic that Christians have replaced Jews as God’s chosen community, solidified during the second and third centuries as the Church’s dominant perspective. It would be equally defining in Protestant denominations after the Reformation. Negative portrayals of Jews begin to become a way to define Christian identity and the meaning of Christianity against Judaism, as Christianity relies on a fantasy Judaism to define it as its polar opposite. Even apparently less-hostile figures would strengthen the tradition. Immensely influential, Augustine’s views helped keep Jews alive in some contexts, but they also established a status that put Jews in peril in others. “Augustine’s relatively benign attitude toward Jews is rooted still in assumptions of supersessionism that would prove to be deadly. The ‘witness’ prescription attributed to him—Let them survive, but not thrive!—would underlie the destructive ambivalence that marked Catholic attitudes toward Jews from then on. Ultimately, history would show that such a double-edged ambivalence is impossible to sustain without disastrous consequences” ([Carroll 2001](#), p. 219).

promotes the idea that Palestinians are being “crucified” on the cross of Israeli policy, rhetoric that invokes the ancient antisemitic accusation of deicide.

The 2014 IPMN campaign and its three publication components are of interest not only in themselves but also because their anti-Zionism embodies both the ideology of the BDS movement as a whole and the sometimes-distinctive convictions that have driven divestment and boycott initiatives in other Christian denominations. *Zionism Unsettled: A Congregational Study Guide (Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA))*, is a large-format, full color, heavily illustrated 74-page book-length publication coordinated by Walter T. Davis, an emeritus professor of Sociology and Religion and a former director of the Advanced Pastoral Studies Program at San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo, California. Released in January 2014, *ZU* was itself drawn in part from the full-length book *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*, edited by Davis and Donald E. Wagner (Wagner and Davis 2014), a professor and director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at North Park University in Chicago, both are Presbyterians and emeritus faculty members. *Quest* was not likely widely available until the month after the June 2014 meeting.

*ZU* was coordinated with the video series that has a total running time of 198 min.

The entire three-part project is marketed as an integrated course on the history, theology, and current politics underlying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The word “Unsettled” in the title has a dual meaning, expressing the aim of destabilizing or unsettling the Zionist project and of stripping the Holy Land of all Jewish settlements, hence “unsettling” it. In order to make it clear that the project constitutes a collective, consensual document issued jointly with Friends of Sabeel North America and not simply a collection of opinion pieces by individual authors, the names of the authors of individual chapters in the guide do not appear either in the table of contents or with the title of each chapter, but rather in a footnote in reduced type at the bottom of the opening page of the individual sections.

Each of the nine sections has two parts, except for the last, which has three. The second topic in each section is an unsigned “Focus” page. None of the brief published commentaries on *ZU* has addressed the structure of the book, which is one of the reasons I reproduce the table of contents here. People familiar with secular debates about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict will note that several of the chapter titles highlight religious interests different from those that occupy secular BDS initiatives. But the authors of *ZU* were clearly challenged to integrate, rather than juxtapose (as with chapters two and five), religious and secular concerns: Chapter titles are in bold: 1. **Toward a New Framework/Palestine, Israel, and the United Nations**//2. **Political Zionism/Constantinian Religion**//3. **The Concept and Practice of a Jewish State/A Tale of Two Villages**//4. **Christian Views of Jews and Judaism/The Covenant**//5. **A Jewish Theology of Liberation/Extremism and Intolerance in Israel**//6. **Mainline Liberal Protestants and Israel/Israel’s “Image Problem”**//7. **Evangelicals and Christian Zionism/What Diaspora?**//8. **A Palestinian Muslim Experience with Zionism/Memoricide**//9. **A Palestinian Christian Postscript/Emerging from the American Jewish Cocoon/“Judaizing” the Land**. One could argue that a seamless integration of secular and theological issues would have been stronger, but the authors opt instead to appeal to different Protestant constituencies separately.

### 3. The Biblical Covenant with Israel

Although debates over the meaning and application of Old and New Testament texts have not had wide influence outside Christian and Jewish faith communities, in those communities at least they have long been in either the foreground or the background of the arguments people bring to their understanding of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. With the exception, perhaps, of the evangelical community, however, politics has gradually displaced theology at the core of many contemporary Christian debates. Over the last generation it seems that it is increasingly those who oppose contemporary Zionism, rather than those who endorse all but the most religiously-based versions of it, who are most likely to invoke God’s biblical covenant to grant the holy land to the Jewish people.

Since the early history of the Church, in an argument since abandoned by most major Christian denominations, supersessionist theologians have argued that God's covenant with Israel was effectively ended by Christ's life and crucifixion and that the Church has now inherited it. Or they have focused on the possibility that the covenant was conditional, dependent on the Jewish people adhering to God's law, an argument that survives in contemporary suggestions that Israel's current conduct means the covenant is still open to being revoked. Some have promoted a version of Christian universalism, suggesting that the covenant actually addressed all lands and all peoples, not some particular piece of Middle Eastern territory.

The 1973 Presbyterian report cited earlier states firmly that "The Abrahamic and Davidic covenants speak not of a spiritual bond nor of oneness based on ethical norms, but of a particular people linked to the Land as a result of God's promise" (p. 34). This "particularism" was long used as a justification for antisemitic violence. The debates promoted by Palestinian liberation theology have also insisted that Zionists persist in claiming a divine warrant for the existence of the Jewish state. Moreover, IPMN suggests that Israelis today overwhelmingly assert the applicability of a divine covenant, which is more than misleading, it is not true. While it might seem that the fundamentally secular character of the Zionist movement presents an obstacle to this claim, it in fact makes it possible for IPMN to mount a conspiratorial and antisemitic theory about how secular Zionists cynically used invocations of God's covenant to promote a takeover of Palestinian land. The authors of *ZU* mention that Palestinian Christian "Mitri Zaheb refers to this practice by secular Zionists as an effort to intentionally 'brand' the State of Israel as a 'biblical entity'" (p. 22). A *ZU* focus page on "The Covenant" expands on the Zionist conspiracy: "By linking the Zionist political project to prophetic 'promises,' many Jewish and Christian believers could be led to accept the Jewish state-building project as not emerging from the human mind, but God's" (p. 31). A quotation from Ilan Pappé seals the indictment: "'they did not believe in God but He nonetheless promised them Palestine'" (p. 31). In other words, faithless Jews duped innocent Christians into applying an ancient religious story to contemporary life. "Yes", *ZU* emphasizes, "the Bible tells us of God's activity in covenanting with Israel, but it was ancient Israel, not the modern political State" (p. 66).

Readers of *ZU* will look in vain if they seek any evidence that this plot to deceive Christians ever existed, and IPMN does not cite examples of Israeli land policy defended with biblical justifications. But the assertion does useful work in IPMN's project nonetheless, not only as part of an ongoing campaign to disparage Christian Zionists, though that is one of its aims. For it makes it possible to suggest that the Jewish state is paradoxically the new pagan Rome, an embodiment of "idolatrous political nationalism" (p. 33). In this way, the anti-Zionist campaign comes full circle: Zionism created a secular state that falsely claims theological warrant for its existence, but since it is in fact a community of nonbelievers—only a quarter of Israeli Jews are devout—we can understand how a faux Jewish state could betray true Jewish values of fairness and equality. No better set of false assumptions could be found for asserting that anti-Zionism is not antisemitic.

#### 4. Representative Factual Errors in *Zionism Unsettled*

While the effort to lay the blame for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict at the feet of Zionist ideology is the IPMN project's main focus, that goal is grounded in a series of false historical claims. Several are deceptively offered as factual asides that uninformed readers are unlikely to question. Thus, for example, the first "Focus" section baldly informs us that in 1947 "at the time of partition Palestinian Arabs owned approximately 93% of the land in Palestine, Jews 7%" (p. 10). This figure is a complete fabrication and should not have been endorsed and promoted by a religiously-affiliated group.

Although real estate records in Palestine were poorly documented, no one who has read much about the matter is unaware that a substantial part of Palestine was not private property. It was controlled by the Ottoman Empire until the empire was defeated in World War One. In 1922 that land fell under the administrative control of the British Mandate until the 1947 UN vote that created the

Jewish state, at which point it was inherited by Israel. The British *Survey of Palestine*, dating from 1945–1946, reports that at least 65 percent of Palestine was such state-owned land.

ZU's falsification of the data is graphically-reinforced when it reproduces the notorious set of maps showing what purport to be the main stages of Israeli land takeover, beginning with a 1946 "map" that shows virtually all of Palestine in green identified as "Palestinian land". Of course, the presentation of this fabricated data serves ZU's argumentative interest: convincing the reader that the creation of the Jewish state was fundamentally unjust. Indeed, the effect is to suggest that the "sin of occupation" (p. 35) begins decades before Israel conquered the West Bank in 1967, predating the 1948 creation of the Jewish state and embodied in fully legal Jewish land purchases since the late 19th century. Did Palestinian Arabs own more land than Jews in 1948? Yes, according to a 2013 data review funded by an Arab-Jewish group generally critical of Israeli land policy, Palestinian Arabs owned between 21 and 28 percent of Palestine, but far from the exaggerated 93 percent proportion IPMN would have us believe was the case.

A few pages later, ZU invokes the supposed fact that "war broke out between Jewish and Arab forces when Israel declared independence in May 1948" (p. 14). The fact that the 1948 war began when the new state was attacked by Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria is conveniently omitted. Matters arguably get worse when Walter Davis and Pauline Coffman state in *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land* that "the Arab armies never attacked Israel proper (that is, the area allotted by the UN for a Jewish state), but restricted their military activities to the defense of that portion of Palestine that the UN had allotted for an Arab state" (p. 22).

The definitive study of the war is Morris (2008)'s *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, which is the source I use. The Davis/Coffman passage allows us not only to suppose that some high legal principle was at issue in the Arab conduct of the war but also that the Arabs invaded both to protect the Palestinian Arabs and to defend the UN's partition standard. While popular Arab opinion was inflamed by the pleas for help by Palestinian Arabs, the leaders of the Arab states each had land conquest and the expansion of their own national territory in mind. Had they been better organized and met less Jewish resistance they certainly would have eliminated Israel altogether.

When an Egyptian armored column started moving northward along the Mediterranean coast on 15 May 1948, Israelis certainly understood the Egyptian aim to be the elimination of the new Jewish state and Tel Aviv to be the ultimate target. Indeed, the Egyptian air force bombed Tel Aviv in May and June. The kibbutzim the Egyptians attacked along the way were not determined by their location in relation to partition, but rather their location on their invasion route. When the Iraqi forces attacked the Coastal Plain settlement of Geulim on May 28 they were, contrary to the fiction promoted by IPMN, within the area ceded to Israel by the UN partition plan. They were also less than ten miles from the Mediterranean, which meant Israel was in danger of being cut in two. Jordan violated the UN plan by occupying East Jerusalem, including the Jewish Quarter in the Old City. The UN plan had Jerusalem as an internationally administered city. IPMN's authors ignored the most well-researched academic historical studies whenever they found an outlying opinion that matched their political convictions.

## 5. *Zionism Unsettled's* Polemical Agenda

There are two somewhat distinct topics to address here—the project's overall aims and strategies and its numerous specific errors and misleading claims. In the end, even rigorously faith-based efforts have to make strategic decisions about issues, arguments, rhetoric, spokespersons, and images if they are to produce books and videos. They should monitor their ideological impulses so as to recognize when fact-checking is necessary to avoid succumbing to confirmation bias when deciding whether to validate a given assertion. ZU's editors failed to honor that principle fully, and the project as a result becomes a propaganda enterprise.

One way that happens is to cite a previous author's undocumented opinion as though it is now an established fact, something the authors of *Zionism Unlimited* do repeatedly. Fact-checking within the echo chamber of anti-Zionist opinion will not suffice. And ZU's authors did not even have the fig

leaf of a university press peer review process as cover. *Zionism Unlimited* is structured by strategic decisions, misrepresentations, and factual errors that will not be readily apparent to those who are not dedicated students of the Israeli–Palestinian struggle.

One strategic decision was the choice to make only one reference to the BDS movement in the entire *ZU* book (p. 35), a decision in keeping with IPMN’s wish at the time to make itself appear as an independent effort, despite the fact that the project throughout is in harmony with, and in complete support of, the BDS agenda that IPMN had embraced for years. That reluctance matches the Church’s effort to differentiate its boycott resolutions from the BDS movement. In *Quest*, Wagner characterizes this as merely a Protestant effort to “utilize BDS strategies (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) or similar economic leverages” (p. 170), “among the instruments of nonviolence that are capable of promoting peaceful change in societies that resist justice” (p. 172), a global claim about Israel that draws no distinction between current government policy and the rest of Israeli society and its institutions. That one reference in *ZU*, moreover, comes in a quotation from Rabbi Brant Rosen’s essay in *Quest* in which he says the BDS movement, as embodied in Jewish Voice for *Jewish Voice for Peace* (2017) and multiple Protestant denominations, is “challenging the American Jewish establishment’s Constantinian hegemony on Israel”. In a 2017 essay written for the JVP collection *On Antisemitism*, Walt Davis claims that “the Zionist ideological narrative” and its consequences for Palestinians “makes BDS necessary” (p. 21).

The “Constantinian” modifier invokes the merging of religion and state power and draws on the second “Focus” page, “Constantinian Religion” (p. 16), which cites Carroll (2001)’s *Constantine’s Sword*, a ground-breaking account of the Catholic Church’s long history of promoting anti-Judaism with antisemitic consequences. Interviews with Carroll occupy part of episode four of the companion video as well. The moment when Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, which led to Christianity becoming a state religion with the power to enforce its views and sanction heretics, is transformative, the cross came to double as a sword, a weapon. *ZU*’s authors find one fault in Carroll’s account: its “expose is incomplete because it errs, like many well-intentioned partners in the ‘ecumenical deal,’ in failing to recognize that Israeli policies are also an expression of ‘Constantinian religion’” (p. 16). But Israeli policies are not grounded in theological conviction, nor do secular Israelis see the Jewish state as the realization of a divine covenant.

*ZU* does review Christianity’s anti-Jewish history of “forced conversion, exclusion, execution, humiliation, caricature, ghettoization, pogroms, and genocide” (p. 25) in chapter four, “Christian Views of Jews and Judaism” (pp. 25–30). But *ZU* arrives in the wake of decades of Catholic and Protestant reconciliation efforts with Jews, including the Catholic Church’s historic 1965 statement *Nostra Aetate*, a declaration that marked the Church’s break with centuries of supersessionist antisemitism.<sup>2</sup> *ZU* has a particular need to appear to embrace that tradition, rather than seem decisively outside it, because of the book’s substantially unqualified BDS-style denunciation of the Jewish state.

The reconciliation effort, however, includes several necessary components: breaking with the nearly 2000-year antisemitic supersessionist tradition in which Christianity declares itself the new Israel, with its covenant replacing the one Jews traditionally have with their god, confronting the long history of antisemitic Christian activism, including Martin Luther’s implacable hostility to Jews, embracing the core message of love Jesus preached and honoring it in contemporary relationships, and

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<sup>2</sup> *Nostra Aetate* (“In Our Time”) ([http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html)) was promulgated by the Catholic Church in 1965 as one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. It declares that Jews should not be presented as rejected by God and that Christ’s crucifixion “cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, nor upon the Jews of today”. “With this simple statement an entire theological edifice, built over centuries, collapsed” (Fisher 320). “It is easily the most significant document concerning Jewish–Christian relations in Church history since Paul in Romans 9–11. In 15 sentences it rejected anti-Judaic theological polemics and condemned antisemitism, and replaced them with the foundations for a renewed vision of the continuing role of the Jewish people in God’s plan of salvation for all humanity” (Fisher 320). About the state of Israel, it should be noted, the Catholic church has retained considerable ambivalence.



recognizing the unique and universal violence done to the human capacity for good and the escalation of the capacity for evil represented in the Holocaust.

ZU is not altogether successful on any of these fronts. The problems with ZU's engagement with the Holocaust begin in the first chapter. The authors point out that both the Hebrew term for the Holocaust, *Shoah*, and the Arabic term for its collective tragedy in 1947–1948 when 750,000 fled or were forced out of the new Jewish state and lost their homes, Nakba, translate as “catastrophe”. We do not need to treat these events as either equivalent or comparable to recognize that they are both catastrophes in their own terms, and that any given people will invest deeply in their own history and suffering. Palestinians generally see the Holocaust as a fundamentally European crime, not as a violation of basic human values for which we must all bear witness, though one might cite as evidence of Palestinian involvement the fact that the Mufti of Jerusalem was a Nazi ally and sought refuge in Berlin. The continuing Arab relation to the Holocaust is highlighted by the fact that, as Herf (2009) has documented in *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, contemporary Arab antisemitism can be traced in part to World War II Nazi propaganda disseminated in the Arab world. The hatred of the new state that bloomed in 1948 and sent five nations to war against it thus owes something to Nazi Germany as well.

Matters are not helped in the ZU video series either. In the second episode, Ilan Pappé minimizes the Holocaust as merely “one of the worst genocides” and crudely tells us that “for the sake of its PR [public relations publicity] and to silence its critics Israel is willing to sell the victims of the Holocaust”. While prime ministers Begin and Netanyahu have been sometimes willing to exploit the Holocaust for political purposes when it is not relevant, other leaders have not. It is a slander to level this accusation against Israel as a whole. That is what ZU does when it declares that “Israeli politics are driven by actual and manipulated fear of annihilation (another Holocaust)” (p. 20). There are contexts in which fear of annihilation reasonably drives policy, including the concern that a nuclear-armed Iran represents an existential threat. But it would be absurd to claim Holocaust anxiety lies behind hundreds and thousands of Israeli policies or dominates the intricate and multi-faceted dynamic of its political debates.

ZU sanctimoniously urges that “no exceptionalist claims can be justified in our interconnected, pluralistic world” (p. 9). Despite the BDS movement's efforts to convince us that Palestinian suffering has a greater moral claim on us than that of any other contemporary people, one should certainly agree that “morally hazardous claims of a hierarchy of victimhood” (p. 9) are mistaken. Yet that does not mean that the historically unique character of the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, or the century's other examples of mass murder should be erased, or that engagement with them should be geographically or culturally limited. That the Nakba was a tragedy is clear, but its more fitting comparison is with the large number of European refugees forced from their homes during World War II, not with genocide.

Trying to confuse claims about the unique character of the Holocaust with what amounts to a slander about the Jewish people that crosses a line into antisemitism, ZU asserts that “exceptionalism exempts the chosen from the need to conform to normal rules, laws, or general principles that we use to hold other people accountable” (p. 8). It is then an easy step to add a further accusation to the exceptionalist chain of equivalences: “The dark side of Zionist exceptionalism today is the ethnic cleansing and land confiscation of Palestinians justified by an appeal to God's will derived from biblical texts” (p. 8). While a tiny minority of Israelis are capable of making such arguments, most Israelis are secular and would never do so. Most Israelis consider the concept of chosenness an irrelevant anachronism. The status of the Jewish people as “chosen”, furthermore, has long been distorted to mean superior or uniquely valued by God, rather than the original meaning of being chosen to embody and honor the burden of the law. As Reuven Firestone demonstrates, the three major monotheistic religions have all at various points in their history embraced versions of chosenness. For Christianity, claiming chosenness is a component of supersessionism and closely linked to the claim that Christians have replaced Jews and inherited the covenant with God. There is no basis for claiming that Israel

justifies its policies by claiming it is a “chosen people”. The argument crosses the line into antisemitism by suggesting Jews have a hostile sense of their own superiority over other peoples.

Equally fallacious, but perhaps more painful, is *ZU*'s suggestion that the burden of responding to the Holocaust is exclusively a European one. Once you make that assumption, it is easy enough to conclude that when the Palestinians lost land they became “secondary victims of the Holocaust” (p. 6), despite the statement's offensive effort to blur the character of the Holocaust and diminish its effect on its true victims. Some of *ZU*'s contributors both before and since its publication have expanded on the claim that the Palestinians are also Holocaust victims. In his 2017 book *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, Naim Ateek argues that “Palestine and its people were sacrificed on the altar of Western guilt” over the Holocaust, that “Palestinians were compelled to pay the price by their dispossession and loss of homeland,” and that “One can even say that the Palestinians were the easy scapegoats” (p. 32). Characterizing the Palestinians as “scapegoats” for the Holocaust once again crosses a line into an antisemitic fantasy unsupported by historical fact.

For *ZU* to embrace that view on behalf of the Presbyterian Church is wholly unacceptable. It does not help that the text goes on to make a comparison between Zionism and Nazism, first noting that the theologian Paul Tillich “considered Nazism a false, secular alternative to prophetic Judaism and Christianity as it was based on pagan Teutonic myths of Aryan racial supremacy and was, in essence, a closed system with no room for the prophetic critique that the Hebrew Prophets and Jesus brought to humanity” and then immediately declaring Zionism as well “a closed system with little room for prophetic critique” (p. 38), an extraordinary claim in the light of the unrelenting prophetic critique that permeates the Jewish State. However irresponsible it is for individuals to promote a Zionism/Nazism equivalence, it is far more transgressive to prose it as church policy. Here, and elsewhere, *ZU* unfortunately follows the standard BDS strategy of treating Zionism as monolithic, whereas from its inception in the 19th century to the present-day Zionism has been both an evolving movement and a diverse one. One straightforward definition has, however, held throughout: Zionism is the belief that, after centuries of marginalization or persecution, the Jewish people should have a homeland of their own where they can have the opportunity to control their own destiny in the land of Israel.

The challenge *ZU* faces in the light of Catholic and Protestant rejection of centuries of defining themselves in relation to a demonized Jewish other is to escape similar implications when they advocate for virtuous action in opposition to the purported depravity of a demonized Jewish state. They must free their hostility of any taint of antisemitism. But it is not so easy for Christian denominations, as they came into existence and established their identities in part through antisemitism. So, a cloud hangs over them. And *ZU* does not dispel this history simply by testifying early on to “the similarities between Zionism, South African apartheid, and Jim Crow segregation in the Southern US” (p. 18). In chapter 8, a condensed version of Mustafa Abu Sway's essay in *Quest*, we are reminded that “Racism is the cornerstone of the Zionist project” (p. 50). But the Anglican Reverend Naim Ateek, one of the authors of *Kairos Palestine*, gets the final word: “Zionism is a false theology” (p. 56).<sup>3</sup> “From a Palestinian Christian point of view”, it “is a retrogression of the Jewish community into the history of its very distant past, with its most elementary and primitive forms of the concept of God . . . a narrow and exclusive concept of a tribal God” (p. 33). It “commits theological injustice by its appeal to God, history and race” (p. 57). *ZU*'s numerous and varied attacks on Zionism do not help dispel the impression that traditional supersessionist antisemitism lurks behind the project as a whole.

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<sup>3</sup> The *Kairos Palestine Document* (<http://www.kairopalestine.ps/index.php/about-us/kairos-palestine-document>), published in 2009, was composed by Christian Palestinian representatives of several affiliations and represents the manifesto of the Christian BDS movement. Building on liberation theology arguments and theological political documents crafted by South African anti-apartheid activists, the *Kairos Palestine Document* defines Israel as the world's premier source of injustice and evil, simultaneously praises non-violence and advocates violent resistance to the Jewish state, and embraces multiple versions of anti-Israel boycotts.



While attacks on Zionism have always been central to critiques of Israel, it is worth pointing out what special paradoxical status they have in IPMN's project. IPMN sees Zionism simultaneously as a secular movement manipulating religious Christians in traditional Protestant denominations and as a fundamentalist religious movement shaping Israeli policy and appealing to evangelicals. Central to the insistence that Zionism is fundamentally a religious philosophy, a theology, is the claim that it conceives the state of Israel as a "biblical entity" established in fulfilment of God's will. Of course, there are both Christians and Jews who believe that, some with fanaticism, but there are millions in both secular and faith communities who simply do not think in those terms. While *ZU* aims to discredit those *confused* "Christians who are not able to distinguish between biblical Israel and the newly created state of Israel" (p. 22), especially evangelicals, the focus on Zionism is also more broadly directed to *ZU*'s faith community. Framing the argument in terms of Zionism appeals to all those who think partly in terms of spiritual essences, including all those committed to some version of Christian eschatology. Moreover, treating Zionism as a transhistorical, essential belief system and political imperative speaks to those who imagine it is possible to recognize a nation's soul. Zionism *is* Israel, *ZU*'s authors would have us believe, everything else about a diverse and notoriously disputatious country disappears before that reality.

These very basic errors are enhanced by what one may consider to be sloppiness enhanced by confirmation bias. In a few cases, *ZU* makes statements so divorced from reality that only people who know the relevant literature could possibly understand their source. A good example is the assertion that "Jewish life is alive and well in the Islamic Republic of Iran" (p. 48), a claim that Iranian propaganda promotes, but that has been documented as horrifically untrue. A community of over 100,000 in the late 1970s, Jews in Iran now number fewer than 9000. Their leadership is expected to condemn Israel, though false accusations that Iranian Jews are Israeli or US spies have nonetheless been promoted and led to executions.

More serious still is the document's promotion of the BDS affirmation of a full-scale right of millions of Palestinian descendants of the 1948 exiles to return to Israel within its pre-1967 borders. Since the Camp David Accords, it has gradually become clear that even the Palestinians involved in formal negotiations no longer make that demand, which would imperil the Jewish majority, but rather ask for a frank acknowledgement of Israel's role in the Nakba, a very limited right of return for those with immediate family members in Israel, and compensation for lost property. The BDS movement continues to make it an issue two decades after West Bank Palestinian leaders privately resolved the matter and moved on, despite public rhetoric to the contrary. It is true that Palestinian leaders have failed to educate their people about the necessity of this concession, but *ZU* is not helping matters by misrepresenting the matter for their readers by treating a universal right of return as a necessary objective. Equally regrettable is *ZU*'s implied endorsement of the view that the existence of a *de facto* single state encompassing the West Bank means that the two-state solution is dead. Faith communities would benefit from debating that issue, but not from a foundation that the matter is already decided.

At one point, *ZU* makes a powerful observation that is among the few statements here that could inspire a very different engagement with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: "With Augustine's and Anselm's perspective in mind, the traditional view (that the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is 'the most complete revelation that God has yet granted humankind') claims more than any individual can know" (p. 30). Comparable doubt about (and willingness to question) the project's conclusions regarding the Jewish state could underwrite faith-based reconciliation efforts that would actually contribute to the search for peace.

*ZU* is decidedly vague about how and when reconciliation should actually play out in that process, but key texts from the Palestinian Liberation Theology movement, whose arguments are so central here, are more revealing. As Ateek (2017) writes in 2017's *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, "there are three essentials that must be realized in order for a genuine peace to be achieved: justice, peace, and reconciliation. The sequence is important" (p. 142). In other words, all reconciliation efforts are invalid until Palestinians secure full justice—on their terms—and peace has been achieved. But reconciliation

is a process. It should begin now, but may not be fully realized until years after a peace agreement is implemented. That parallels BDS anti-normalization arguments against contact with Israelis on any basis that assumes equality between the parties and that is not based fundamentally on an Israeli admission of absolute responsibility for all injustice related to the conflict. But peace negotiations are not likely to succeed without sufficient reconciliation to achieve mutual empathy and respect for one another's historical narratives. During peace negotiations themselves, sufficient reconciliation to curtail mutual demonization will also be critical. And the negotiations will need to specify forms of economic and military collaboration based on a significant degree of reconciliation. If the implementation of an agreement is to be in stages, as is almost certainly the case, reconciliation will have to proceed in stages as well.

## 6. Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land

*Zionism Unsettled* was the product of a 14-member project committee and group of writers, editors, and image researchers headed by Walt Davis. Other than Davis himself, none of the authors of the essays in *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land* appear on the list of those directly responsible for *ZU*. Presumably, that means none of the *Quest* authors save Davis himself condensed their own essays for publication in *ZU*. *ZU* actually appeared on 20 January 2014, five months before its source text, *Quest*, which was officially published July 1, though copies may have been available a few weeks before that. Unlike *ZU*, *Quest* thus likely had only very limited effect on the Presbyterian General Assembly's June 20 vote by a 310 to 303 margin to divest from three companies doing business in Israel and "profiting from the occupation" of the West Bank.

Readers of *ZU* alone have no indication about the relationship between the two books or about what was left out of *Quest* in the process of editing it for its new life as *ZU*. *Quest* does include an unusual disavowal of editorial responsibility for fact checking: "The writers, not the editors, bear responsibility for the accuracy and interpretation of this (Israeli-Palestinian) history" (p. 2). Although that disclaimer is not repeated in *ZU*, it has effectively been invisibly grandfathered into the guidebook. But a comparison of the two publications is instructive. *Quest* not only fleshes out the positions held by *ZU*'s authors, it also clarifies what strategy *ZU*'s compilers had in mind in their campaign to influence church members and push the divestment agenda.

Some differences may seem straightforward. Carole Monica Burnett's *Quest* survey of Eastern Orthodox history and contemporary perspectives was likely judged less-critical and omitted, but the editors may also have preferred to avoid dealing with her intense anti-Israel hostility. She reads a series of ancient and contemporary theologians and religious leaders so as to marshal them for a condemnation of Zionism. Burnett excuses John Chrysostom's fiercely anti-Jewish sermons (pp. 386–87 CE) as typical of the age's rhetorical excesses. While that is partly true, she ignores their unique, powerful influence on subsequent violence against Jews. Meanwhile she applauds early supersessionist arguments, such as that "Christ is the source of meaning, the *raison d'être*, of the Old Testament" (p. 97) or "the land grant to ancient Israel was tied to a particular era of history and is surpassed by salvation in Christ" (p. 98). Origen she finds particularly instructive for contemporary usage: "the spiritual significance of the Promised Land is that it symbolizes Christian perfection" (c. 212–215 CE) (p. 99), not any relationship between god and the Jews. Jerome (c. 393 CE) reinforces that reading: "the Old Testament 'land of promise' is the heavenly kingdom of God, not Palestine" (p. 101). Her language is carefully chosen to draw contemporary parallels. Thus Basil, Bishop of Caesarea, "condemned the practice of land seizure and home demolition committed by the wealthy against their social inferiors" (p. 101). She concludes the historical section of her essay by invoking the antisemitic trope of the greedy Jew: "the church fathers' affinity for symbolic interpretation of the Promised Land plus their abhorrence of greedy acquisitiveness, combined with their advocacy for the poor, add up to a patristic tradition that offers no support for the current Zionist perpetration of land seizure, expulsion of residents, and repopulation in the West Bank" (p. 102).

Other *Quest* passages eliminated in editing *ZU* reinforce the conclusion that they were deleted to make the guidebook somewhat less aggressive in its anti-Zionism and more palatable to a broad Presbyterian and interfaith audience. It is possible that some readers would, for example, have been still more offended by the Davis and Coffman statement that “a ‘Jewish state’ legitimizes racism and discrimination in favor of Jews in all areas of public life” (p. 47), by Sway’s blunt declaration that the idea of “a Jewish democracy is an oxymoron” (p. 204), by Wagner’s insinuation that there is a contemporary lesson in his reminder that “the Prophet Elijah once challenged the people of Israel who had chosen the pagan religion of Baal over the religion of the one true God” (p. 173), by Ateek’s amplification of his characterization of Zionism as “a false theology”, common to both books, with the outrageous claim that Zionism “promotes death rather than life” (p. 219), or by wider quotation of the rhetoric in Brant Rosen’s original essay, as in such passages as “liberal American Christians have been theologically blackmailed into silence over Israel’s human rights abuses” or his account of responses to the *Kairos* USA statement: “the Jewish Council for Public Affairs . . . hysterically condemned its ‘extreme rhetoric’ and referred to it as a ‘false witness’” (p. 88). What is missing from *ZU* is the charged modifier “hysterically”. Rosen’s key claim that Israel represents “the living embodiment of Judaism as empire” makes its way into *ZU*, but not some of the statements that underline the intensity of that claim, such as the characterization of Israel as an “overmilitarized garrison state” (p. 67) or “this quasi-Faustian bargain we have made with political nationalism” (p. 87). In a 2017 essay written for JVP’s *On Antisemitism*, Rosen repeats the Faustian bargain claim without the “quasi” modifier, adding that Israel “commits human rights abuse at home and exports it abroad” (p. 134). Rosen, it should be remembered, was one of the most vocal supporters of convicted terrorist Rasmia Yousuf Odeh, despite her involvement in a 1969 Jerusalem supermarket bombing that killed two people.

Brant Rosen’s chapter in *ZU* is one of three, along with those by Gary Burge and Abu Sway, that is presented in the form of a third person summary, rather than as a direct condensed version of the original essay. While it would be easy for readers to miss that difference, it gives the editors greater license not to represent the original essays fully. Thus, while the summary of Burge’s essay is straightforward in demonstrating that he is promoting a supersessionist or replacement theology of his own, his claim that the “suspended blessing” of God’s covenant with the Jews will be “restored at the end of history when Christ returns, when ‘all Israel will be saved’” loses some of its edge when his assurance in *Quest* that Judaism “will join the church” (p. 189) is omitted.

For those who consult both *ZU* and *Quest*, the two texts amplify and complicate one another. That is partly a function of format. *Quest* is a conventional, unillustrated print book that offers extended argument. *ZU* is a complex bricolage, a mixture of signed and unsigned contributions, chapters and inserts, illustrations with independent and argumentative captions, sidebars, and study questions. There really is nothing quite like it either in the pro-BDS or anti-BDS literature. The bricolage format, almost that of a compressed, popular coffee table book, has the effect of multi-directional critique, a kind of extrajudicial triangulation of Zionism that leaves no escape from a guilty verdict.

It is almost as an aside that *ZU* tells us “there is a growing consensus—except, notably, in the US and Israel—that the existing *de facto* one-state situation/solution is irreversible” (p. 23) and consequently that the two-state solution, the gold standard since 1947, is dead. There is no such consensus, though out of either warranted frustration or malice toward the Jewish state some maintain that only a single state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea with equality and justice for all can cure the disease of Zionism. That is a recipe for civil war, not a guarantee of equality and justice, but the appeal to a benighted humanism can seem persuasive to idealists both within and without faith communities. For readers persuaded by the *ZU* project, one thing will be clear: Israel has so betrayed human value as to eliminate its very right to exist, and thus, the real problem with a two-state solution is that Israel would still be there. A solution that sustains the existence of a Jewish state is no solution at all.

As many advocates of a two-state solution point out, its fundamental outlines are clear: not “an end to Jewish settlements” (p. 22), as *ZU* unrealistically declares, but incorporation of those near the 1967 borders with Israel and evacuation of those deeper into the West Bank, not a full right of return

to Israel proper for the few remaining living refugees and millions of their descendants, as the BDS movement insists, but return for a few and full compensation for losses for others. Two states for two peoples has been and remains the only route to justice for both peoples.

The paradox of a workable peace is that it will require not only a maximum degree of separation between the two peoples, but also a maximum degree of collaboration between them. The presence of violent agents among both Israelis and Palestinians requires modes of separation, including the much-demonized separation barrier, less than ten percent of which is actually a wall, the rest being a wire fence that can easily be rerouted as necessary. Collaboration should entail working together on security and on infrastructure needs, from water resources to drip-based agriculture to sanitary systems, and tens of thousands of additional Palestinians should get legal permits to work in Israel. The full list of areas of cooperation would be longer, its implementation, over time, could make it possible to tear down that wall. But not now. Meanwhile, Israeli government policy toward Gaza and the West Bank needs to be changed, with counter-productive practices like house demolitions eliminated, but that will most likely happen when Israeli citizens demand it.

In the end, the key response to the *ZU* project necessitates not simply questioning its facts and interpretations, but rather asking what it contributes toward the options that faith-based movements have to make distinctive contributions to the peace process in the Middle East. Foremost among these are the many Christian efforts to promote empathy, mutual understanding, and reconciliation. *ZU* and *Quest* do nothing to promote those values. Instead, they relentlessly castigate and demonize the Jewish state, a rhetorical tactic which only pits the parties against one another in what amounts to a war of words and potentially antisemitic moral recrimination. Contrary to the BDS movement's claim, reconciliation does not lock in injustices, instead it provides the shared respect that is a prerequisite to overcoming them nonviolently. Faith-based constituencies everywhere have roles to play in promoting change from the bottom up. *ZU* and *Quest* go a different route. Perhaps the very clarity of their antagonism can help some make a different choice.

## 7. Before and After Zionism Unsettled

As the first section of this essay makes clear, Presbyterian debates over Israel and the Palestinians have a long history. Some of the principles underlying debates in the twenty-first century are codified in a 1980 General Assembly publication, *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling*, which does not—except for a few sentences—directly address the Middle East, although it echoes church documents from the 1970s that do address it. There the church highlights one of the governing motivations behind support for Palestinians: “it is not possible to ignore the incongruous juxtaposition of affluence and arms on the one hand, and poverty and oppression on the other . . . Our insensitivity to today's patterns of injustice, inequality, and oppression—indeed, our participation in them—denies the gospel” (p. 5). In multiple passages, we are told that “Concern about freedom and justice may well call for policies that side with the dispossessed” (p. 26). Belief that the Palestinians are the primary victims in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict was already present in the church by 1948–1949, although that conviction was long moderated by awareness of the Holocaust. Over time, however, the Holocaust receded in centrality for some Presbyterians.

Still more directly influential was the 2010 General Assembly report *Breaking Down the Walls*. Written by nine appointed members on behalf of the PC (USA)'s Middle East Study Committee, among its notable stands is its opening argument that invokes a broad humanistic opposition to “walls” in general and links it to Israel's security barrier, the first continuous segment of which was completed during the Second Intifada. “We are called to be those who break down these walls that stand in the way of the realization of God's peaceful and just kingdom” we are told at the outset (p. 1). The misguided application of an uninformed opposition to all barriers to free movement has guided the BDS movement's continuing demand that the wall be torn down, even though that would encourage violence, not peace.

The policy document is then prefaced by eight “letters to our church, partners, and engaged parties”—the ecumenical community, American Jews, American Muslims, Middle Eastern Christians, Palestinians, Israelis, and all Americans. The letter to American Jews affirms that “we support the existence of Israel as a sovereign nation within secure and recognized borders” (p. 5). The letter to Israelis declares church members to be “strong advocates for Israel’s secure existence” and says “we are fervent in our hope that Israel would continue to be a homeland for the Jewish people” (p. 9). The language, including the indefinite article “a”, is carefully crafted to leave open the option of a one-state solution dominated by Palestinians. The other letters do not repeat these assurances, which seriously undermines any commitment they might embody. Worse still, however, is the document’s endorsement and reprinting of both “The Amman Call” and *Kairos Palestine*. *Kairos* demands an unqualified Palestinian right of return, rejects the idea of a Jewish state, and castigates the West for making amends for “what Jews had endured in the countries of Europe . . . on our account and in our land” (p. 74). Despite the PC (USA) in 2008 issuing a call for a more even-handed approach to the conflict, *Breaking Down the Walls* went so far as to lend legitimacy to denying Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state. It was condemned by the Anti-Defamation League, among others.

Four years later, the IPMN issued the influential *Zionism Unsettled*, a much more expensive undertaking. *Breaking Down the Walls* was a conventional printed text. *ZU* was neither the first nor the last full-color, oversized book produced by IPMN in this distinctive format. Depending on how you count, it was either the second or the third, but it was certainly the one most widely publicized and debated. The aesthetic adopted for IPMN’s full color books was basically visual, it requires much less reading, being devoted only to short texts interspersed with pictures.

*Steadfast Hope: The Palestinian Quest for Just Peace (Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA))*, the first in the series, was published in June 2009, accompanied by a DVD. A second, somewhat revised edition, appeared in April 2011. The introduction to the 2011 edition reports that the first edition “was written in a spirit of guarded optimism”, but that “those hopes were dashed”. Now all “peacemakers” must confront Israel’s “systematic discrimination against Arab citizens . . . a bleeding, untreated wound inflicted in 1948”. The authors write now with a “burning desire to speak to the Church with the unvarnished truth about this conflict”. “The Church has been here before”, they add, “and it is now awakening to the truth that God is calling it to be there again” (p. 1). Most of the chapters in the second edition of *Steadfast Hope* remain unchanged. The major change in the text is the addition of a detailed essay, “Post-Gaza: a new chapter in the quest for just peace” (pp. 36–39), which focuses on critiques of policies adopted by the Netanyahu government.

Two years after *Zionism Unsettled* was published, the PC (USA)’s Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) issued *Israel-Palestine: For Human Values in the Absence of a Just Peace* for the 2016 General Assembly. It was yet another long anti-Zionist report, this time produced by an official church committee. Since IPMN is a voluntary interest group, the church can claim its publications do not represent the PC (USA) or its views. The ACSWP report, on the other hand, displays the official church logo and is prefaced by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, declaring it was formally adopted as church policy in June. This time the PC (USA) cannot keep the text at arm’s length.

The authors of the report unfortunately did not care to do adequate fact checking. Thus, they immediately tell us the First Intifada was “largely nonviolent” (p. 20), despite over 800 Palestinians having been executed as suspected collaborators with Israel. Hurling stones and Molotov cocktails was a standard demonstration tactic. Israel lost a hundred civilians and sixty Israel Defense Forces (IDF) personnel. Thousands on both sides were injured, and over a thousand Palestinians died. We are informed that “advocating for the ‘two-state solution’ or any other particular political arrangement has often distracted people from ongoing events and suffering” (p. 6). They inexplicably declare that East Jerusalem “under Jordanian control before 1967” was “accessible by all religious groups” (p. 18), but of course Jews could not even access religious sites like the Western Wall or the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif. They tell us the Israeli blockade of Gaza is responsible for “causing lack of food security among much of the population”, but all authorities, including Palestinians themselves,

report that food supplies are adequate. The problem is that the poor cannot afford to buy food in stores, a problem exacerbated by the Palestinian Authority's decision to withhold Gazan income. When they acknowledge Palestinian hostility toward Israel, they qualify it in misleading ways, telling us, for example, that the "few" tunnels Hamas dug into Israel were only "purportedly dug to enable assault teams to attack Israeli border posts" (p. 29). Then they cast doubt on the claim Hamas's rocket attacks were "unprovoked" (p. 30). They condemn attacks on UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) schools in Gaza without reporting that the schools intentionally targeted were used as weapons depots, making them valid targets.

On behalf of Presbyterians for Middle East Peace, Todd Stavrakos and Michael Gizzi produced "A Response and Rebuttal to the ACSWP Report", which is an effective and detailed counter to the entire project (Presbyterians for Middle East Peace 2016a). They begin by taking particular issue with the report's use of the term "Zionist Judaism" in a derogatory effort to suggest that Judaism itself has been corrupted by what ACSWP sees as political Zion's abuse of human rights. They add that "Speaking of 'tribal loyalties' with reference to Jews is code language used in the past and present to question the loyalty and fealty of the Jewish people in the states they reside" (p. 7). They point out that ACSWP "treats attacks on Israeli civilians as armed resistance, when they are really acts of terrorism" (p. 6). In a telling rejoinder to the report's sympathies with Hamas's willingness to treat Gazans as expendable, Stavrakos and Gizzi declare that "It is disturbing to find a Body of Christ offering legitimacy for such violence" (p. 13). One needs to add, finally, that a number of church members are active in both IPMN and ACSWP. They are intertwined political projects.

## 8. Why Palestine Matters: The Struggle to End Colonialism

Once again, the anti-Zionist forces in the church struck back. The third, entirely new addition to the IPMN book series, *Why Palestine Matters: The Struggle to End Colonialism*, a sequel to *Zionism Unsettled*, was issued in April 2018, just in time for PC (USA)'s annual meeting in June. The first publication in the series was *Steadfast Hope: The Palestinian Quest for Just Peace*. Toward the end of *Why Palestine Matters*, there is a decidedly improbable effort to extend the politics of intersectionality to include a link between Gaza and Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. The second item in "Parallels with Puerto Rico", "Letter from Gaza: 'We Are All Puerto Ricans,'" opens by declaring "I know what it's like to struggle with shortages of vital supplies such as electricity, gas, cash, and safe water" (p. 82).

*Why Palestine Matters* is a 110-page oversized book consisting of 39 essays, over 30 breakout supplements, and a large number of illustrations with full paragraph captions. It includes three very useful color maps, one each of Gaza, West Bank settlements, and West Bank Areas A, B, and C. The editors describe it as the third "study guide" issued by IPMN, but it is so fiercely one-sided that it really serves exclusively as an ideological and political manual for anti-Israel organizing rather than a neutral study guide. The volume connects with IPMN's history by once again explicitly aligning itself with the BDS movement, but this time doing so at length. Many of the essays are new, but a few are excerpts from earlier publications. In the latter category are Steven Salaita's intensely worded "Cultural Appropriation or Theft?" which warns us that use of the phrase "Israeli hummus" as a product label for the well-known appetizer amounts to "a project of erasure, a portent of nonexistence, a promise of genocide" (p. 61) and Sarah Schulman's "Rebranding with Sex and Sexuality", which reprises her 2011 brief against "pinkwashing", the purported effort to distract attention from the military occupation of the West Bank by highlighting Israel's gay-friendly legal and cultural environment.

The book's political stance is signaled at the outset not only by its subtitle, but also by its foreword by Richard Falk, a former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 and one of Israel's most relentless long-term opponents. He concludes his assessment of Israel's history and present prospects by insisting that "negotiation of a sustainable peace depends on the prior disavowal and abandonment of the apartheid regime that Israel relies upon to subjugate the Palestinian people" and agreement "that any legitimate state or



states that emerge in Palestine formally must be neither religious nor ethnic” (p. 8). A page earlier he had declared that “denying involuntary exiles a right to return to their native country is a grave violation of international refugee law” (p. 7). He envisions a full right of return for all descendants of the 1948 Arab refugees, 97 percent of the original refugees themselves by now being deceased. If the result were to be a majority Arab state, any promise that it would be a securely secular entity would soon be forgotten. A home for the Jews it would not be.

The page devoted to Puerto Rico follows many pages devoted to more familiar “intersections”, including that promoted by a segment of the Black Lives Matter movement. An Israeli Defense Force/Hurricane Maria parallel, notably, is a completely empty analogy. Neither the two instances of infrastructural devastation nor the human tragedies they accompanied have anything to do with one another. An international relief effort could address urgent requirements in both places, but then what Puerto Rico needed was a serious full-scale commitment from the wealthiest country in the world, not international charity. I had expected the editors of *Why Palestine Matters* to base the case for the “intersection” of Gaza City and San Juan on underlying racism as the common cause. That certainly goes a long way to explaining the Trump administration’s indifference to Puerto Rico’s plight, but it has little or nothing to do with the Netanyahu administration’s tragic and highly dangerous neglect of Gaza.

*Why Palestine Matters* appropriately places the 1901 US Supreme Court case *Downes v. Bidwell* at the root of the secondary status of the island, but that is not an adequate explanation of why Hurricane Maria did not provoke a new push for Puerto Rican statehood. The fact that the Island would vote reliably democratic has more to do directly with a Republican Congress’s unwillingness to address its statehood status. The specifics of history can get squarely in the way of promoting “intersections” between injustices in different parts of the world. The editors print a photograph of three Puerto Rican women arm-in-arm with a Palestinian American San Francisco State University professor holding a “*Mujeres en Puerto Rico/Solidarias con Palestine*” banner and assure us that “Palestine solidarity is an enduring feature of Puerto Rican intersectional activism”, but an “enduring feature” is not actually a central one.

Susan Landau’s essay “Nonviolent Economic Action as Resistance”, an essay that attempts to be a primer on the BDS movement, is illustrated with a photo captioned “The arrest of Rosa Parks on 1 December 1955, catalyzed the Montgomery bus boycott” (p. 86). This is a still more far-fetched intersection, since not only half the planet but also half a century separates the two movements. Indeed, Landau’s essay doesn’t invoke the American civil rights movement. Perhaps the editors chose the illustration hoping to trigger an emotional reaction. Some historical moments deserve their nearly sacred character as unique events. They cannot actually be honored by exploiting them for unconnected political purposes. Americans especially should not be called upon to think “Israel” when they see the moving photo of black demonstrators waving as the Alabama bus goes by. Israel critics and supporters alike should all be able to treasure that image, in a moment of solidarity purified of irrelevant contemporary conflicts.

Notice that intersectionality will be now be central to IPMN’s and the book’s effort to appeal to American readers comes with the introduction, which is titled “Intersectionality and the Shared Struggle for Human Rights”. The “intersection” put forward there is not between any particular social or political circumstances but rather, in the style of BDS anti-Zionism everywhere, on the wholly abstract plane of universal justice: “Justice in one place is not enough without justice everywhere . . . Scholars now use the term *intersectionality* for this interwoven web of rights and the common struggle to realize these rights all over the world” (p. 9). Yet these struggles have to be waged under local conditions and in the context of local politics and history. Invoking universal principles has genuine value in local struggles, but the struggle is not simply a universal one that can be transported intact across time and space. There is nothing scholarly about the term *intersectionality* used this way, it is merely a rhetorical platform, a persuasive strategy, not a category of scholarly analysis. It has become a slogan, a rallying cry that tries to transform analogy into identity.

Used properly, intersectionality can be a powerful analytic tool. It helps us see how what appear to be separate social and political forces—like race and gender—intersect in a given place and time, combining to have a more powerful impact. But claims of intersection across time and space artificially link what are typically no more than partly parallel phenomena, obscuring the critical details necessary to full understanding. Claims that things happening in different cultures are actually identical can undermine the perspectives required for effective political action.

Contrary to what the book's editors would like people to believe, the project of human emancipation can be carried out in some places without being carried out in others. Indeed, that project would otherwise be an impossible one to wage. The introduction concludes by claiming the project of human emancipation "cannot proceed without Palestine", but actually, for better or worse, it can. Different struggles for human rights can inspire one another, one can learn from one struggle and try to modify its lessons so as to apply them elsewhere, but the work begins anew in a new setting.

The first chapter, "Palestine Through the Lens of Colonialism and Intersectionality", and the second, "An Intersectional Approach to Justice", then follow. Whether this was a good strategy for anti-Zionist advocacy in the [Presbyterian Church USA \(2010\)](#) remains to be seen. It represents established rhetoric on campus, but it leaves behind the theological ground that has been important in the churches, thereby completing a trend away from theology and toward politics among Protestant denominations debating the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

*Why Palestine Matters* then throws its lot in with intersectionality in a far riskier and more thoroughgoing way. For the next section is comprised of four double-paged color spreads, eight full pages, all in the book's oversized 8.5 by 11-inch format. The four spreads: "Intersectionality: Threads of Connection", "Interconnected Struggles: Intersectional Politics Grounded in Effective Alliances", "Militarization, Repressive Policing: Unprecedented Connections Across Movements and Border", and "Cross-Movement Connections: Building a Global Movement for Justice", do not advance arguments or make a case for particular "intersections". They declare them with disconnected one-paragraph statements and an array of twenty-six color photographs and posters. At best it represents juxtaposition instead of intersection, jettisoning any sense of a debate within a religious denomination.

A key example of mere juxtaposition is the book's repeated effort to link the Native American opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline with organized resistance in the West Bank and Gaza. The resulting confusion has no real bearing on Israel, but it does obscure the tragic and continuing history of Native American oppression and discrimination in the Americas, effectively exploiting the Native American story for use in the anti-Zionist agenda. The long effort first to exterminate and then suppress and marginalize Native Americans is a story that deserves its exceptional character. The willingness to discount both Native American culture and values is a part of that story that persists today. But any effort to resist the forces that conspired against American Indians in North Dakota has to focus on the political power wielded by the gas and oil industry and the political power wielded by the industry's Republican allies at the state and national level. Making this a story about manufactured "intersections" with Israel only dilutes and derails education and advocacy on this side of the ocean.

The prominence given purported solidarity with Native Americans in *Why Palestine Matters* is unsurprisingly, moreover, primarily part of the BDS movement's antisemitic racialized anti-Israel strategy. *Why Palestine Matters* offers no evidence that Jewish Israeli attitudes toward Arabs are fundamentally racist. With roughly 100 different essays, mini-essays, essay excerpts, and argumentative photo captions offering a jumble of varied sites of assertive opinion, the book operates as much by insinuation as by responsible argument. Nonetheless, when Jewish Voice for Peace Media Manager Naomi Dann tells us late in the book that the white supremacist Richard Spencer sees himself as "a white Zionist" and "might be right about Israel" she is drawing together antisemitic threads that have been woven throughout: "There is a disturbing alliance between Zionists and white nationalists in the White House these days, and it doesn't come from nowhere. There is a shared bedrock of anxiety about demographics and racist and Islamophobic fear of 'Arabs' that goes hand in hand with both worldviews" (p. 89).



It is partly demographics that proves this accusation a slander. It is critical for the editors of *Why Palestine Matters* to remind us that the Jews who returned to Palestine in the late 19th and early 20th century were largely white and European, that fact is central not only to the racialized story the editors want to establish for Zionism, but also to their settler colonialist narrative. The truth that gets in the way of this story is that in the years after Israel was established as a state, some 800,000 Jews fled from often ancient communities in surrounding Arab countries to settle in Israel. The majority of Israel's Jewish population today, descendants of those exiles, are of Middle Eastern, not European, descent. Socio-economic gaps remain, but these Mizrahi Jews are critical to the coalition that brought Likud to power. Nonetheless, G. J. Tarazi insists that "the ruling elite in Israel today, are not Middle Eastern but are European settlers" (p. 12). Just to cite a few important counter-examples: In the 2018 Israeli government there were 21 ministers, of whom 8 are Mizrahi, 2 are mixed, 1 is Druze and 10 are Ashkenazi. Of the last 5 chiefs of staff of the IDF, 2 were Mizrahi (Mofaz, Halutz), 1 mixed (Ashkenazi), and 2 are Ashkenazi (Yaalon and Gallant), the chief of staff Gadi Eizenkot, is Mizrahi—both his parents are from Morocco.

The majority of Israelis are Middle Eastern, even more so when the 20 percent of Israeli Arabs are added to the mix. If the standard marker of the socially-constructed illusion of race is skin color, then Israelis and Arabs are indistinguishable. There is no lack of hostility to neighboring Arab countries in Israel, but that hostility is not racial in character. Making it seem so is nonetheless a useful anti-Zionist strategy.

So Israelis here are accused of a "racism 'of the heart,'" an "insidious racism that cannot be changed through public policy and laws" (p. 14): "The racial domination that took centuries to develop in the United States has been concentrated and accelerated in Israel and Palestine" (p. 14). Here, we cross the line into antisemitism in a dramatically new way for IPMN. *Why Palestine Matters* aims to convince us that "The treatment of African Americans in the United States and Palestinians by Israel is shockingly similar" (p. 15). Long-time Israel opponent Pauline Coffman concludes that "The situation eerily parallels White Nationalists in the US calling for limits on non-White immigration in order to maintain the demographics they prefer" (p. 71). "How do we connect the dots between US racism, white supremacy, and the issue of justice in Palestine" (p. 89), asks Susan Landau? We do so, the editors believe, by repeatedly announcing they are connected.

Tarazi presses this agenda further still by suggesting that, when we examine the status of Palestinians, "parallels can be seen in the history of slavery in the United States" (p. 13). The comparison is warranted, he argues, because they "used the Bible as a weapon" to subjugate others they considered "less than human". That view is readily substantiated for slavery in the US but is wholly unsupportable as a characterization of Israeli attitudes toward Palestinians. Both that claim and the antisemitic accusation that Israelis are engaged in genocide should have been excluded from the book.

*Why Palestine Matters* is on far better ground when it alerts readers to a growing crisis in Gaza, a position both I and many Israelis have been arguing as well for several years. Three essays—those by Jennifer Bing, Ron Smith, and Harry Gunkel—are devoted to Gaza, the latter combining extreme hostility to Israel with an eloquent plea: "in her illness and darkness, Gaza offers us her hand. How can we refuse it" (p. 45)? Excoriating Israel, the standard BDS response, will not actually help the situation by bringing relief to Gaza. Nor does Kathleen Christison's attack here on the reconciliation and dialogue initiatives that have been a hallmark of Christian contributions to the peace process ("Who's Afraid of Dialogue? Normalizing Oppression"). "These efforts", she writes, "tend to be feel-good projects that lull supporters and donors into an ineffectual complacency". Such "normalization", she adds, "concretizes the status quo, standardizes the dominance of the strong party over the weak party, the occupier over the occupied" (p. 60). In fact, the mutual understanding such projects generate is essential if peace negotiations are to proceed.

When *Why Palestine Matters* confronts Gaza, it is long on condemnation and short on practical recommendations. Bing's call "to end the cruel and inhumane blockade" (p. 42) is no help either. The blockade should be moderated, but, if it were simply lifted, Hamas would bring in serious

offensive weapons and the military conflict would escalate. Egypt and Israel instead should combine forces to lift restrictions on exports from Gaza to help its economy. The US and other countries should press the Palestinian Authority to withdraw its effort to limit Gaza's electricity supply and carry out other assaults on Hamas. The fishing limit should be extended from six to at least fifteen miles. Meanwhile, Hamas repurposes reconstruction aid to rebuild its military infrastructure, starting with rebuilding its assault tunnels. But there are Arab countries that could manage reconstruction projects directly to prevent that from happening. International advocacy should focus on the practical steps that must be taken to improve conditions in Gaza. The Presbyterian Church could play a major role there, but *Why Palestine Matters* does not point us in that direction. Detailed promotion of the existing Christian projects to build mutual empathy and understanding can make a major difference. The misdirection of Christian effort may be IPMN's most damaging legacy.

## 9. Presbyterians for Middle East Peace

Participants in the PC (USA)'s 2016 meeting had a comprehensive report available that provided an objective, well-reasoned analysis of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The eighty-page booklet, *Two States for Two Peoples: A resource developed by Presbyterians for Middle East Peace* (hereafter *Two States*) is unlike the several IPMN products in every respect ([Presbyterians for Middle East Peace 2016b](#)). *Two States* is not written as a response to *Zionism Unsettled*—indeed, *ZU* is only mentioned once, taking exception to *ZU*'s antisemitic characterization of Zionism as a “false theology” (p. 41)—though the PMEP booklet is designed to reeducate church members, counter the IPMN campaign, and repair the damage the boycott movement had done to the church's ability to contribute effectively toward peace and reconciliation.

Virtually nothing in the booklet qualifies as polemical, whereas almost everything in *ZU* does. *ZU* bills itself as a study guide, then provides relentless indoctrination. *Two States* takes seriously its desire to be a resource by giving readers multiple objective area maps and such thoroughly neutral sections as one listing and explaining the various Israeli political parties and government structures. The PMEP document is scrupulous in its presentation of fact, even-handed in its treatment of Israelis and Palestinians, and consistently sound in its analysis. Contrary to IPMN's efforts to claim indigeneity for Palestinians alone, for example, *Two States* explains why “Both Jews and Palestinians are indigenous to the land, and both Jews and Palestinians have a history of immigration to the land” (p. 4). It does make judgments, reaching negative conclusions about both Hamas and the BDS movement, but even those judgments are measured, as when it assesses a BDS/IPMN tactic: “It is easy for an advocate to cherry-pick legal viewpoints to support a given agenda or vilify an opponent. This kind of debate does not move toward peace, rather ‘it would only add an insoluble element to what is already an extremely difficult problem.’ A reckless pursuit of ‘justice’ rather than a negotiated peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians is actually an obstacle to peace” (p. 31). As PMEP would advise us in the 2018 supplement to “Two States for Two Peoples”, “‘justice’ is a catchy term and easy to sell with little or even fraudulent information. (p. 27)”. Instead, *Two States* first offers two guiding principles:

The rights, dignity, and aspiration of both Israelis and Palestinians must be honored and respected

- *The course of action supported must be consistent with principles of universal human rights: the right of self-determination and democratic governance, the right to free expression and peaceful assembly, the right to a nationality, and the right to live in peace with neighbors*

That neither Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority honor these principles is an inconvenience IPMN simply ignores. As a way to move forward in harmony with these principles, *Two States* endorses two passages from The Alliance for Middle East Peace:

- *People-to-people encounters are an effective and necessary strategy to create such sustainable collective public support for peaceful mutual coexistence on equal grounds and reconciliation.*

- *Support for civil society programs in the Middle East is one crucial way that the international community, U.S. Government, and private philanthropists alike can positively move the peoples of the Middle East toward peace.*

Of course, BDS and IPMN reject these options as examples of unacceptable “normalization”.

As Reverend Chris Leighton, at the time Executive Director of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies, writes, ZU “turns us from peacemakers to polemicists”, he writes, “and from honest dialogue partners to partisan ideologues . . . The authors go to great lengths to document the worst expressions of Zionism and the American Jewish community, while completely exonerating the Palestinians from any ideologically driven teaching that fails to promote peace . . . To suggest that the Jewish yearning for their own homeland—a yearning that we Presbyterians have supported for numerous other nations—is somehow theologically and morally abhorrent is to deny Jews their own identity as a people . . . The word for that is ‘anti-Semitism’”

In 2018, PMEP published “Two States for Two Peoples 2018 Supplement” ([Presbyterians for Middle East Peace 2018](#)), a forty-page update and elaboration on the previous publication. Early on it describes BDS as a movement “whose leaders have called for the elimination of the Jewish state of Israel while recruiting followers on the premise that BDS is nothing more than a human rights campaign” (p. 4). Among the important additions to our understanding that *Two States* makes is a section describing the Palestinian assaults on freedom of speech and press freedoms in Gaza and the West Bank (pp. 7–8). *Two States* also makes a strong case for strengthening the Palestinian Authority’s governing capacity as part of a nation-building process necessary for creating a viable Palestinian state. As part of that discussion, the pamphlet conducts a serious review of concepts of sovereignty and how they apply to a potential Palestinian state. The scholarly character of this analysis has no equivalent in any IPMN publication. Its citations to previous scholarship reinforce the sense of the project’s objectivity.

PMEP’s important work gives Christians of all denominations a rational alternative to the hostile disinformation that BDS allies within the churches have been disseminating. Both sides in this debate invoke longstanding Christian values in their support, but justice and reconciliation lie more fully in the good faith PMEP has offered than in the hostility and alienating condemnation flowing from the other side.

The Presbyterian Church has had a dual track history regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict for half a century, but that means some in Church leadership have long offered exemplary advice, understanding, and mutual respect. They know how to advance reconciliation directed not toward submitting to an unacceptable present but toward a future two-state solution that would assure dignity and security for both peoples. The clearest earlier evidence may be the remarkable 1973 book *Peoples and Conflict in the Middle East*, hereafter *PAC*.

Offering an assurance categorically at odds with the IPMN/BDS publications, *PAC* concludes by reasserting to readers that the church “does not wish to be understood as preaching moral obligations to the nations concerned with Middle Eastern issues, in the light of centuries of antisemitism and particularly of Western treatment of the Jewish people in this century, and in the light of the long history of Crusades and colonial subjugation of the Arab peoples” (p. 51). *PAC* opens with a parallel principle, one of several here that counter the BDS anti-normalization campaign: “The task force specifically rejected any attempt to judge between the parties involved in the Middle East as to which has been dealt with most unjustly. The cup of suffering caused by displacements, pogroms, crusades, and holocaust is full. Solution must be found at some level beyond the attempt to weigh the suffering of one people against that of another” (pp. 8–9).

Moving forward, they advise, “we do not believe advance can be made without conversation” (p. 9). In an observation no less true now than it was fifty years ago, *PAC* recognizes that a productive dialogue “demands a higher respect for the faith, traditions, sufferings, accomplishments, and even the myths of the contending parties than either is now willing to grant the other . . . It requires that all parties ask the questions that can make the future and not only those which would remake the past”

(p. 10). “The tragedies of the past cannot be ignored”, they add, because “the past is a part of the blood, bone, and soul of the peoples of the present, “yet “neither can the future be made of “those tragedies (pp. 10–11). The goal is productive reconciliation, which “can never succeed in winning agreement from those who believe that the definitive humiliation of one or another of these Middle Eastern peoples is essential” (p. 11). The IPMN/BDS agenda is grounded in the effort to achieve the definitive humiliation of the Jewish state. Happily, the church can use select documents from both past and present to guide it in promoting the reconciliation that is its true Christian mission. PAC states the matter clearly: “The way to peace, there as here, lies not through partisanship and polarization but through reconciliation Shalom Salaam” (p. 10).

## 10. Conclusions

The conflict between PMEP and IPMN has its parallel in a number of mainline Christian churches. Thus, for example, by the time the 200,000-member British Methodist Church, which had voted to endorse the boycott of settlement products in 2010, was in the process of considering more aggressive policies, the larger church was already considering such moves. Central to that effort was the large anti-Zionist book *Israel-Palestine: A Mission Study for 2007–2008*, which was published on behalf of the United Methodist Church’s Women’s Division within its General Board of Global Ministries. Meanwhile, the United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR), a product of a grassroots movement of Methodist clergy and laity, was initiated in October 2010 by a group within the UMC and reaffirmed in 2018, with an accusation that Israel’s Nation State law codified an apartheid legal system. It has consistently asserted that the occupation is the major threat to the Christian presence in the Holy Land. On the other hand, a member of United Methodists for Constructive Peacemaking in Israel and Palestine declared “we are not going to participate in the continuing demonization of one side over the other or the continuation of policies that bring about fear and isolation for one side over the other” (Richard Horowitz). As with the Presbyterians, Methodist advocacy has coalesced into competing groups.

*Israel-Palestine: A Mission Study for 2007–2008* is divided in two parts—a long essay (pp. 6–127) by Stephen Goldstein, a Jew who converted to Christianity, and a “study guide” (pp. 129–213) by Sandra Olewine (Goldstein and Olewine 2007). Goldstein tells us the outlook of the Jews who settled in Palestine was “basically racist, and still is . . . they do not see Palestinians as human beings like themselves” (p. 32). The arguments put forward parallel those offered by IPMN, but each anti-Zionist church group also has its own strategies. Thus, Olewine tells us “we are called to see the places where Christ is still wounded, even crucified, through the pain and struggles in people’s lives today” (p. 131), a familiar trope, but then mounts an unusually elaborate way of reinforcing the analogy. Following a series of sections summarizing the life of Jesus, she leaps two thousand years to the present in the section titled “Who Will Roll the Stone Away?” Christ is once again today being prevented from rising. None of us can be redeemed while Israel has placed a boulder that blocks the entrance to his tomb. It is a deeply religious and theological accusation, fundamentally antisemitic in character. She has retold Christ’s story not only to give her own narrative credibility, but rather to abandon analogy for identity. There are good Jews who want to move the stone, but can they? Israel’s weight is against the stone.

As this analysis has shown, the passions that drive BDS allies in secular groups have led Christians as well to use antisemitic tropes and rhetoric. Unfortunately, the consequences in Christian denominations are arguably more serious. That is because, despite the legacy of Christian antisemitism, there are alternative church traditions that could be employed in the service of peace. Churches have substantial experience in reconciliation initiatives that should be expanded to bring more Israelis and Palestinians into dialogue. Contrary to BDS claims, such efforts do not harden the status quo in place. Instead they reinforce the empathy, trust, and mutual understanding that are necessary for nonviolent change. The mainline Protestant denominations that have joined the effort to demonize Israel are thus undermining the special contribution Christian groups can make toward the resolution of the

Israeli–Palestinian conflict. That is why all of us, both within and outside the churches, need to know about these developments and become prepared to address them.

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Article

# Israel and Zionism in the Eyes of Palestinian Christian Theologians

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**Abstract:** Christian activism in the Arab–Israeli conflict and theological reflections on the Middle East have evolved around Palestinian liberation theology as a theological–political doctrine that scrutinizes Zionism, the existence of Israel and its policies, developing a biblical hermeneutics that reverses the biblical narrative, in order to portray Israel as a wicked regime that operates in the name of a fallacious primitive god and that uses false interpretations of the scriptures. This article analyzes the theological political–theological views applied to the Arab–Israeli conflict developed by Geries Khoury, Naim Ateek, and Mitri Raheb—three influential authors and activists in different Christians denominations. Besides opposing Zionism and providing arguments for the boycott of Israel, such conceptualizations go far beyond the conflict, providing theological grounds for the denial of Jewish statehood echoing old anti-Jewish accusations.

**Keywords:** Palestine; Israel; Zionism; Christianity; antisemitism

## 1. Introduction

The way Palestinian Christian communities relate to Israel is defined by nationality and religion. As Palestinians, Christians tend to embrace the national narrative that advances a political discourse opposed to Israel’s policies and, at times, also questions its right to exist as a Jewish state. As Christians, Palestinians struggle with religious conceptualizations of Judaism and Zionism that have developed in the Christian world ever since the Holocaust. The stances of the Evangelical Christians, overtly supportive of Israel, are, all in all, condemned and rejected.<sup>1</sup> The ambiguous position of other Christian Churches toward Israel also conflict with the new approach toward Judaism, which revised traditional anti-Jewish tropes.

The Biblical roots of Jewish peoplehood intertwine with Jewish history and they shape both Zionism, as a national movement, and the discourse on Jewish statehood. Israel’s existence as a Jewish state and its national narrative are entrenched in the Biblical narrative. Israel’s Declaration of Independence, for instance, clearly states that the State of Israel is the modern definition of Jewish statehood, which was first attained in the Land of Israel, where Jewish nationhood came into being,<sup>2</sup> also stressing the historical continuity of Jewish nationhood from Biblical times to present day. Largely

<sup>1</sup> See (Ateek et al. 2005).

<sup>2</sup> The incipit of Israel’s Declaration of Independence states: “The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.” The historical continuity is then stressed by the following words: “After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom. Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland.” The excerpt was taken from the English translation available at [https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat\\_eng.htm](https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm). Part of the historical narrative of continuity is also the uninterrupted Jewish presence in the Land of Israel over the centuries.



sharing the same Scripture, Jews and Christians differ in the interpretation of those concepts that are at the basis of Zionist readings of the Bible, including the meaning of “the Promised Land.”

The Jewish–Christian dialogue, which evolved in both the Catholic and Protestant world since the 1960s, has progressively reassessed the Christian conceptualization of Jews and Israel. The idea of a Jewish state is sometimes embraced and supported, such as among Christian Zionists of protestant denominations,<sup>3</sup> and sometimes merely tolerated, such as in Catholic doctrine.<sup>4</sup> However, ambiguous as some theological positions may be, Jewish statehood is rarely opposed and one may maintain that Israel as the product of the Zionist project is accepted, even if not justified or welcomed.

In this respect, Palestinian Christians face the major challenge of incorporating Christian religious beliefs with nationalist narratives. For instance, how to conciliate the concept of Israel as a people and the existing Jewish State of Israel? How to reconcile between the Biblical concept of the Promised Land, the history of Jewish nationhood on the one hand, and the Zionist claims of Jewish statehood on the same land that Palestinians consider “historical Palestine” in its entirety on the other? Even those who are prone to recognizing the existence of Israel would, however, argue that its existence is the result of dispossession based on Biblical claims. More generally, what is the significance of the Old Bible for Palestinian Christians today who are caught between a Jewish State and an Islamic Palestinian Authority?

According to Bernard Lewis, the first Arabic response to the political challenges posed by Zionism was developed by Bernard Lewis by Christian Arabs. Such a response rejected Zionism on a number of grounds, which also included antisemitic tropes, among which the idea that Zionism is a project for regional domination, the belief that Zionism is a peril because behind it world Jewry hides and with it, also its financial power, or the view that Zionism is used in order to dominate Western powers’ foreign policy to the benefit of Jews and to the detriment of Arabs.<sup>5</sup> This last point was, according to Lewis, the main argument used against Zionism, whereby “from the literature of the time, it would seem that it was not as Jews or even as Zionists that the newcomers were feared and then hated, but as foreigners and especially as Europeans.”<sup>6</sup> Some of these positions are shared by current Palestinian Christian thinkers, with the exception that today arguments against Zionism also move from theological grounds, with the consequence of touching upon Judaism as a whole.

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<sup>3</sup> Certain protestant theologies began developing positive views of Judaism as early as the 19th century, when the Restorationism evolved in Britain and in the U.S. Theologians and later also politicians held the belief that the restoration of a Jewish nation in the Land of Israel would lead to the second advent of Jesus. The support for a Jewish national revival in the Land of Israel motivated by Christian eschatological views has influenced politicians and their attitudes toward Zionism and Israel. See (Merkley 1998). From this early conceptualization, other Christian theologies have developed favorable views of Judaism that evolved to an unrelenting support for Israel and Zionism, especially in the context of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Often, such a staunch support is associated with specific political stances on traditional values and opposition to Islam. For an analysis of the theological and political motives at the basis of support for Israel among Christians and their criticism See (Spector 2009).

<sup>4</sup> The Catholic Church, and particularly the current papacy, has often declared that antisemitism is extraneous to Christianity and, time and again, has condemned manifestations of antisemitism. Yet, the definition of contemporary antisemitism in the forms also of extreme hostility toward Israel and Zionism is seldom addressed. According to journalistic sources, Pope Francis has included attacks on Israel’s existence as forms of antisemitism, during a meeting with World Jewish Congress leaders in 2015. See (Pope Equates Anti-Zionism with Anti-Semitism, Says Israel has Right to Safety and Prosperity 2015). In 2015, the Polish Episcopate published a pastoral letter marking the 50 years of the *Nostra Aetate* encyclical; the Vatican document defines new relations with Jews and also recognizes the validity of the Covenant with the Jewish people. The letter, entitled “A Common Spiritual Heritage with the Jewish People”, also tackles the issue of antisemitism, defining it as “a sin against the neighbor’s love, a sin that destroys the truth about Christian identity.” See (Polish Episcopate 2015). In at least one public document, anti-Zionism is mentioned in connection to antisemitism. The Joint Declaration of the 18th International Catholic–Jewish Liaison Committee Meeting, held in Buenos Aires between 5 and 8 July 2004, encompasses “the total rejection of anti-Semitism in all its forms, including anti-Zionism as a more recent manifestation of anti-Semitism.” See (18th International Catholic–Jewish Liaison Committee 2004). However, the Special Assembly for the Middle East convened by the Synod of Bishops in 2010 seems to hold a different opinion. On the one hand, it states that “everywhere in the Church in the Middle East the religious sentiment in anti-Judaism has been overcome, at least in theory, by the pastoral guidelines of the Second Vatican Council”, and also opines that “widespread opinion seems to indicate that anti-Zionism is more a political position and, consequently, to be considered foreign to every ecclesial discourse.” See (Synod of Bishops 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See (Lewis 1999).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

These three authors are identified with what is called Palestinian Liberation Theology, established in the late 1960s in South America and aiming to develop novel interpretations of the Biblical message for contextual responses to social, economic, and political oppression.<sup>7</sup> Kuruvilla has analyzed the inception and development of Palestinian Liberation Theology focusing on its leaders and centers, describing it as “radical Christianity”.<sup>8</sup> In a previous study, the same author analyzed practical aspects of Palestinian Liberation theologians and communities, compared to the South American liberation Theology of the 1960s; Kuruvilla distinguishes two main differences between the two theological movements.<sup>9</sup> Regarding the Palestine–Israel context and the theological response to the conflict, he describes the object of Palestinian Liberation Theology as “a form of racism where Semites are discriminating against Semites”.<sup>10</sup> The political message propagated by certain Palestinian Christian centers, some of which are associated with Palestinian Liberation Theology, was analyzed also by other authors, who take a different stance. Nerel, for instance, maintains that the theological discourse on the conflict results in a de-Judaization of the Old Testament and a novel supersessionism.<sup>11</sup> Other literature has analyzed Palestinian Christian organizations’ activism in the conflict. Van Zile, for instance, taking a clear stance against this type of activism, pointed out how the theological–political discourse is tailored to depict what he labels “anti-Zionist infrastructure.”<sup>12</sup> Besides the theological debate on Palestinian Liberation Theology, there is an underlining question that concerns the consequences of specific arguments used by certain authors for describing the conflict, Israel, and Zionism.

Among the several Palestinian-Christian leaders who have devoted considerable efforts to the Arab–Israeli conflict, one can mention Gerjes Sa’ed Khoury, Naim Stifan Ateek, and Mitri Raheb.

The late Gerjes Sa’ed Khoury, a Catholic, was among the first theologians to develop a contextual reading of the Scriptures in an effort to provide answers for Christian Palestinians torn between Arab identity and politics. He started working in the 1980s, when the Palestinian political consciousness rose to become the outbreak of the First Intifada. Khoury’s work focused primarily on the Church, including both the Catholic Church and the pluri-denominational local Christian community, and its role in the conflict as well as on the identity of Palestinian-Christian Arabs. For him, Israel is the occupier and the oppressor, while Christians are witnesses of sufferance and bearers of the cross.

In light of this situation, Khoury envisions an active Church that takes part in politics and in the struggle against oppression. Yet, his work refrains from directly attacking the Zionist project through theological assertions, and concentrates on Christian communities, which he sees as an integral part of the Arab Palestinian nation, and their role in the conflict.

Other thinkers and activists have built upon these political premises in order to develop a properly theological–political response to Israel and the Zionist narrative as a whole. In this respect, this paper further explores the portrayal of Israel and Zionism in the work of two Palestinian Christian theologians, religious leaders, and Palestinian activists: Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb. They belong to different Christian denominations, the former Anglican, the latter Lutheran; they are religious leaders among their communities, and they are activists who reach out to Christian communities in the Western world to seek support for the Palestinian cause.

Naim Ateek has prolifically written on Zionism and Jewish statehood, opposing the Christian interpretation of the Scripture and the national project of a Jewish state, which in his view is the product of a nationalistic reading of the Bible. This narrow interpretation stems, according to the author, from

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<sup>7</sup> See (Rowland 1988, pp. 126–29).

<sup>8</sup> See (Kuruvilla 2013).

<sup>9</sup> In South America the main issue was class, while in the Palestine–Israel context, it is, apparently, ethnicity; secondly, the Palestinian context is in itself more diverse because the people that lead the cause for liberation are mainly Muslim with a Christian minority; thirdly, Palestinian theologians, contrary to their South American colleagues, do not have a thorough formation. See (Kuruvilla 2010).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> See (Nerel 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See (van Zile 2011).



a “tribal” concept of the divine, which is typical of early Judaism. In contrast with this idea, the prophets’ teachings and the Christian approach are universalist and, therefore, Zionism represents a regressive ideology.

Mitri Raheb, who belongs to the Lutheran Church, started his political–theological activities in the 1990s, with some publications which appeared first in German, on Palestinian national identity and the city of Bethlehem as a symbol of the Palestinian plight that appeals to Christians in the world.<sup>13</sup> Since the 2000s and the numerous military confrontations between Israel and the Palestinian-armed factions, Raheb has developed a conceptualization of Israel as a ferocious Empire that is kept alive by its American allies and nurtured by the implementation of oppressive measures. Here, the use of the Biblical narrative is fascinating: each author uses different Biblical references in order to associate Zionism with the Pharaoh, wicked rulers, and foreign invaders, in order to construe Zionism as a historical manifestation opposed to justice.

Common to all authors is the emphasis on Zionism and the strenuous attempt to dispute its legitimacy both politically and theologically, which results in an uncompromising condemnation of the Jewish national movement. Ultimately, Zionism and Israel represent evil. Although Khoury and Ateek, the latter in his earlier writings at least, occasionally mention a future of two states, this does not imply that they recognize the legitimacy of Jewish statehood. Indeed, the resolute view on Zionism is the conviction of its wickedness, inhumanity, and inherent violence. Whereas Raheb seems more cautious to express clear views on the political future of the region, he resolutely denies any legitimacy to the Zionist project and to a Jewish state.

In an effort to dispute the validity of Zionist claims, these authors develop a theological–political argument that inevitably touches upon Judaism and Jewish political thought, in a manner that revives certain anti-Jewish beliefs. For instance, the traditional view of Judaism as a sterile, legalistic religion is echoed in portraying the Zionist project as the consequence of an ethnic, nationalistic interpretation of the Biblical narrative. Similarly, the traditional conceptualization of Christian supersession of the Biblical message is echoed in a number of arguments that describe the Christian reading of the Scripture as universalistic as opposed to the supposedly particularistic Jewish approach.

It is important to stress that Judaism in itself is not denied or refused. The arguments set forth are theological and political alike, and they aim to support the Palestinian political agenda. Therefore, Judaism is not denied or refused *per se*. Nor are Jews directly attacked. Yet, they are relegated to the role of a disempowered minority, of an ultimate icon of sufferance, of a symbol of persecuted people in exile, while Zionism is associated with aggressive and sordid power politics. Moreover, in an effort to define a Palestinian–Christian response to Israel, certain arguments appear to echo traditional and modern antisemitic tropes, such as the dichotomic view of particularistic Judaism as opposed to universalist Christianity, the consideration of Jewish political or social organized bodies as an alien, disruptive force, and the condemnation of an alleged plan to dominate, if not the world, then at least the region.

The intellectual struggle of these theologians focuses on Jewish nationhood, which is absolutely denied as it is a source of injustice given its particularity. In this sense, the juxtaposition with Christian–Palestinian nationalism is particularly striking, because the Jewish nation is considered incapable of creating a just or pluralistic polity, since it is defined as Jewish. Conversely, Christian–Palestinian nationalism is considered a political movement of liberation that is entrenched in the universalist message of inclusiveness, considered at the heart of the Christian faith. Jewish particularism is an anti-Jewish conception that has its roots in early Christianity, and was further developed in the Middle Ages not only to refute Jewish theology,<sup>14</sup> but also to signify what was considered both Jews’ punishment to ever wander for refusing to accept Jesus and the supersession of the Christian Church in the Covenant with God.

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<sup>13</sup> See for example, Raheb (1994) and some chapters on Christian demography in Israel and the Palestinian territories on Christian–Muslim–Jewish cooperation, and on Christian theological and encounter centers in Bechmann and Raheb (1995).

<sup>14</sup> See (Dahan 1991, pp. 125–36).

The same theme also evolved among the Illuminists,<sup>15</sup> who expected Jews to abandon their particular identity. Levis Sullam argues that the “secularization” of religious anti-Judaic themes by the Illuminists paved the way for modern antisemitism.<sup>16</sup> The same misconception of Jewish particularism and legalism influenced the German philosopher Bruno Bauer to describe Jews, considered both a religious and national group, as lacking of spirit and stubbornly opposed to historical evolution, therefore, incompatible with progress and coexistence with other peoples.<sup>17</sup> Drawing from the same philosophic tradition, Karl Marx further juxtaposes Jewish particularism and sterility as opposed to Christian spiritualism for conceptualizing what he called “Jewish egoism” as the pillar of capitalism and world exploitation of the working masses.<sup>18</sup> The themes of Jewish callousness and the supposed existence of a world Jewry pursuing capitalistic goals also influenced antisemitic tropes referring to Jews as a people conspiring to exploit and dominate. This symbolizes a shift toward political and racial antisemitism.<sup>19</sup> The obstinate attachment to “obsolete” traditions is not just a Jewish religious trait, despicable in the eyes of the anti-Jewish believer, but also the source of a sense of exclusivity and separateness. In the antisemitic mind, the cunning Jew is constantly scheming for dominating other people and using their resources in order to maintain his own particular interests. From a despised group holding obsolete religious beliefs, Jews become a peril for the social, political and moral order. In the Western imaginary of the 19th century, the antisemitic idea of Jewish peril could emerge so strongly because of old anti-Jewish views that characterized Jews as sons of Satan, operating as evil forces and associated with wickedness, blasphemy, and deception.<sup>20</sup>

The anti-Jewish trope of Jewish particularism and antisemitic concerns of Jewish peril are often transposed onto Zionism, which is thus considered not as merely a national movement or as a religious theology, but as a force operating against justice and order. In this sense, critiques of Zionism as a national, political movement, or of its theologically driven contributions are not per se antisemitic. However, there are certain voices that oppose Zionism, which echo traditional anti-Jewish and antisemitic themes. In some cases, opponents of Zionism resort to openly antisemitic “notions of the perfidy and diabolical cunning of the Jews; their corrosive, manipulative will-to-power; their insatiable love of gold and intrigue, mastery of hidden forces and domination of the international financial system.”<sup>21</sup> Other times, anti-Judaism and antisemitism is disguised by historical and political arguments against Zionist ideology or Israeli policies, which portray them as an inherent violent and foreign force. By delegitimizing Israel, certain voices end up supporting the idea that “Zionism aims at racist hegemony or domination,” or “[repeat] on a collective level and within the international arena the discriminatory principles of traditional antisemitism which traditionally branded Jews as an alien element unassimilable into European Christian society.”<sup>22</sup>

This is even more true when theological arguments are put forward against Zionism as the expression of Jewish nationhood. This paper analyzes some of these views and shows how the theological and political arguments do not merely refute the Jewish political project as opposed to Palestinian national aspirations, but extend their criticism to Jewish nationhood as a whole. It appears that the theological-political criticism of Israel does not confine itself to present the case for the

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<sup>15</sup> See (Schechter 2003, pp. 53–65).

<sup>16</sup> See (Levis Sullam 2008, p. 18).

<sup>17</sup> See (Bauer 1843). The same author in a later work develops a quasi-racial antisemitic argument, whereby the integration of Jews would be impossible because Jewish exclusivity and particularism are expressed in Judaism as people. See (Bauer 1863).

<sup>18</sup> See (Wistrich 2012, pp. 75–88). Wistrich describes the anti-Jewish sentiment of the Young Hegelians and the influence of such views on Marxist conceptualization of Jews as a capitalistic parasite that dominated the bourgeois classes. The theme of Jewish mastery through money was later developed by Christian socialists, who capitalized on the image of Jewish usury, and influenced other antisemitic convictions such as supposed Jewish plan for world domination.

<sup>19</sup> See (Levis Sullam 2008, pp. 32–42).

<sup>20</sup> See (Trachtenberg 1961). The author shows how the conception of Jews as agents of evil was firmly embedded in European imaginary not only through words but also through works of visual art, pp. 12–55.

<sup>21</sup> See (Wistrich 2012, p. 510).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 511.

Palestinian cause, nor does it address theological arguments at the heart of Zionist claims. Rather, such criticism directs a much more profound denunciation of the Zionist project as a whole and addresses current Jewish statehood as a theological misconception and source of injustice in its entirety. Hence, the use of Christian theological arguments for addressing Zionist claims cannot but touch upon conceptions of Judaism and Jewish peoplehood.

It is precisely the blurry boundaries between support for the Palestinian cause and theological conceptualizations of Zionism that this paper addresses and the discourse on Judaism that unfolds.

The following sections will analyze the thoughts of Gerjes Khoury, Naim Stifan Ateek, and Mitri Raheb in relation to Israel and Zionism and assess the extent to which certain arguments echo anti-Jewish or antisemitic tropes.

## 2. Israel the Imperialist Evil, Zionism the Distorted Theology

The three authors differently conceptualize Israel as an imperialist state that represents an evil entity and as the product of a distorted theology. Specifically, these sections will analyze what arguments the authors advance in order to oppose the Zionist project.

### 2.1. Gerjes Khoury

Gerjes Khoury founded one of the first theological centers devoted to revive Christian theology in the area where Christianity was born—the al-Liqa'.<sup>23</sup> Khoury devoted his work to the local Christian community and reached out to the Catholic world, the denomination to which he belonged, and especially in Italy, where he pursued his studies and acquired his theological education, seeking support for the Palestinian cause.

The two main objectives of Khoury's work were to develop Palestinian theology and engage in a dialogue with Islam. This latter goal plays a very important role in his writings, where he constantly argues in favor of a cultural and historical commonality with Muslims. The construal of identity is national first (Arab Palestinian) and only after religious (namely, Christian or Muslim): Khoury states that Christians are Arab as Muslims are, who share a common language and history.<sup>24</sup> This is necessary in order to create a shared domain between Christians and Muslims in their opposition to Israel.

In his book *Christian and Muslim Arabs*,<sup>25</sup> Khoury analyzes the necessity and importance of the dialogue between the two religious communities, putting forth several historical and theological reasonings, a number of which touch upon Israel.

Christian–Muslim dialogue is necessary to oppose Zionism, which is defined as a “fallacious exploitation of the Jewish religion”, and is at the basis of the creation of the State of Israel. Such exploitation includes Zionists' political interpretations that led to the suffering of the Palestinian people.<sup>26</sup> In Khoury's view, Zionism, deemed as a specious utilization of the Jewish religion, has also affected Islam, by “encouraging” the development of similar currents that abuse religion for political purposes.<sup>27</sup> The cooperation between Christians and Muslims, Khoury maintains, plays an even more important role in resisting the “Israeli occupation” and its continuous “propaganda and aggression” on “Muslim and Christian Palestinians.”<sup>28</sup> Here, the argument repeatedly advanced is that, since, in the author's view, Israel's policy aims to create divisiveness, Christians and Palestinians need to defy the aggressor together by strengthening “national unity” and “the unity among members of this people.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Encounter, in Arabic.

<sup>24</sup> See (Khoury 2006, pp. 151–52).

<sup>25</sup> See (Khoury 2006).

<sup>26</sup> See (Khoury 2006, p. 133).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

The unity of the Palestinian people is firstly construed as a necessity to stand up to a common enemy, and then as a way of solidarity among Christians and Muslims. In this view, the dialogue among the two communities is also necessary given the misconceptions about Islam, in particular the idea of a violent Islam, furthered by Israel and the West.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, the Christian–Muslim dialogue is necessary for strengthening national unity and in fulfilling the historical role of the Christian community in the region. The author frequently stresses that Christians are Arab, they constitute part of the Palestinian people along with Muslims, and differ only in terms of religion. In Khoury’s words, the Palestinian Christian “is Arab as the Muslim is, and shares with him the language, the history, the civilization, the concerns, the pains, and the hopes.”<sup>31</sup>

Such views are also stressed in his semi-autobiographical “A Palestinian Bearing the Cross,”<sup>32</sup> where the author dedicates an entire section to what he claims is the distortion of the Scriptures for supporting Zionist claims.

Khoury stresses that the promise of the land by God to the Hebrews and the Jews was first of all conditioned on the respect of the Pact and on the adherence to justice, which they did not respect and eventually were punished for with exile.<sup>33</sup> Quoting the prophets, Khoury defines the development of the concept of the Land as first national and then reviewed by the Prophets as linked to social justice.<sup>34</sup> This universalistic call is further confirmed by the New Testament,<sup>35</sup> which transcends the particularistic interpretation evidently attributed to Judaism and Zionism.

By juxtaposing the New Testament, which according to the author focuses on justice, to the reading of the Bible, Khoury comes to the conclusion that the Bible “rejects any Jewish politicized theology” and praises the Palestinian reading of the Bible motivated by a universalist mission in opposition to “exclusivist claims,”<sup>36</sup> attributed to Judaism.

The charge formulated against Zionism is for portraying an exclusivist, nationalist reading of the Bible, which coupled with the sense of divine election would be the reason for Israel’s alleged drive to conquer, invade, and systematically violate international law.<sup>37</sup> Khoury’s denunciation of the nationalist interpretation of God is supposedly directed against Israel as a Jewish State, but it is not always clear if there is a distinction between Zionism and Judaism.

A further argument made by the author explains the confusion that sometimes emerges between Zionism and Judaism. Khoury compares the Hebrew reading of the Bible to the Christian one, stressing the significance attributed to concepts such as nation and Promised Land in the two views. For the Jews, the nation means “the return to the holy land”. The author rejects such interpretation as wrong since it is based on a political reading of the Scripture.<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, the Christian meaning of nation is universal and goes beyond the limits of specific peoples.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, for Christians, the love of the nation is to be interpreted in the sense of serving the peoples living within one nation,<sup>40</sup> evidently opposing this view to Israel, which is deemed to systematically discriminate against those who do not belong to the Jewish national group.

The uncompromising condemnation of Jewish statehood is even clearer when compared to other competing, national movements. For the author, Zionism is responsible for pursuing a plan that brought “chaos in the Middle East”, and Zionist leaders for construing a sense of superiority of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 134. The author specifically mentions Christian groups which support Israel, the Christian Zionists, who are another reason for strengthening Christian–Muslim dialogue (p. 133).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>32</sup> Citing the Italian translation, (Khoury 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 129–37.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 145–47.

<sup>38</sup> See (Khoury 2007, p. 140).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

Jewish race.<sup>41</sup> This would be the reason behind Israel's expansionist ethos and oppressive policies, which not only disrupted a historical harmony among different religious communities, but also brought an end to the Arab nationalist dream of peace.

Tellingly, the Jewish national project is deemed to be in itself exclusivist and particularistic, while the Arab nationalist project would be inclusive and universalistic. Jewish statehood is evil; it brings about oppression and hatred, while the not-yet-achieved Arab statehood will attain justice, liberation, and the triumph of love for the other.<sup>42</sup>

The author states at times that Palestinians want peace with Israel and are ready to accept its existence, yet the whole spirit of his analysis is an absolute rejection of Israel and Zionism, as opposed to the Christian-Palestinian ethos that Khoury is eager to portray and adopt. An historical example described by the author clarifies this point.

Khoury eulogizes the figure of Sophronius of Jerusalem, the Christian patriarch who insisted to meet the Muslim Khalif after the conquest of Jerusalem by Islamic forces in the 7th century. By this insistence, Sophronius saved the Christian holy places from destruction and ensured the beginning of the Muslim-Christian dialogue.<sup>43</sup> His figure is revered as an example of Christian ethos and political sagaciousness. Such an attitude is, however, not even contemplated in the current situation, where, if we accept the author's reasoning, the "occupier" is Jewish.

For instance, the author characterizes the visits of Israeli officials to Christian leaders right after the Six Day War and the beginning of Israel's administration of the territories captured in 1967 as "embarrassing".<sup>44</sup> Again, he criticizes the "diplomatic" approach of the Vatican toward Israeli policies,<sup>45</sup> and, by and large, excludes any kind of dialogue with Judaism unless it is for the denunciation of Zionism and Israel.<sup>46</sup>

In Khoury's view, Israel is considered the epitome of injustice and the occupation is the ultimate source of evil,<sup>47</sup> which obliges the Christian Church to "step in" and face, together with Muslim allies and compatriots, the challenges posed by Jewish statehood. This struggle against Zionism has the aim to restore justice.<sup>48</sup> It appears that the Christian-Muslim dialogue is also conceived in this framework and with this goal in mind, as a platform for opposing Israel, and not just as a venue for creating mutual understanding.

## 2.2. Naim Ateek

Naim Ateek, one of the founders of Palestinian liberation theology, developed a theology that not only refutes Zionism, based on similar arguments as previously discussed, but also exposes what is considered the American-Israeli alliance of empire against the Palestinians. Ateek formulates his claims in a fashion that goes beyond the accusation of particularism as set forth in Khoury's writings, by using a more intemperate language.

In 1989, Ateek published "Justice and only Justice", in which he copes with the Jewish Bible in light of the conflict and Israel as a Jewish state. Confronting what he calls the "political abuse of the Bible," Ateek claims that reading the Bible in light of the conflict questions "God's integrity" and "character."<sup>49</sup> Echoing Gustavo Gutierrez' understanding of Jesus,<sup>50</sup> Ateek claims that Jesus "was

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<sup>41</sup> See (Khoury 2009, p. 124).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121–23.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77–81.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>47</sup> See (Khoury 2007, p. 96).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99–101.

<sup>49</sup> See (Ateek 1989, p. 78).

<sup>50</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez is considered the founder of Liberation Theology, a new understanding of the Christian message that puts the poor at the center of the faith and considers it addressee of God's preferential love. This theology was developed in

critical of the legalistic concept of God held by some of the Pharisees, and he tries repeatedly to draw their attention to the essence of the prophetic tradition.<sup>51</sup> Yet, the author explains that the “old, more pervasive idea of God’s exclusiveness, which involved a special and unique relationship to Israel” typical of the Torah was challenged by “the newer, emerging view of God’s inclusiveness” encapsulated in the prophetic tradition and later in the Gospels.<sup>52</sup>

The Zionist idea of a Jewish state, coupled with claims to the land as part of Jewish national aspirations represents, therefore, “a retrogression of the Jewish community into the history of its very distant past, with its most elementary and primitive forms of the concept of God.”<sup>53</sup> Hence, “[espousing] this exclusivist understanding of God”, Israel breaks away with the tradition of righteousness and exclusively focuses on the claims to the land that result in perpetual injustice to the Palestinian people. This “retrogression” is explained as a breach from the exilic tradition of an ethical Judaism that survives without a territory and with the Christian revolution of the concept of land as a territory on which to dwell according to principles of justice.<sup>54</sup>

What is described as the Zionist’s rabid yearning of the land is explained as a theological fallacy that leads to the injustice suffered by Palestinians. This fallacy consists of a narrow reading of the Bible, which justifies the misleading entitlement to the land by restricting God’s promise to one people. Israel is accused of enacting supremacist policies that would deny the entitlement to the land and other rights to those who do not belong to the Jewish people.

Zionism is not only a theological fallacy, but also the essence of injustice. According to the author, the Zionist project is intrinsically criminal, since “the Zionists wanted the land without the people.”<sup>55</sup> Ateek maintains that Zionists allegedly adopted policies against the Palestinians, Muslims, and Christians alike who “needed to be eliminated or ethnically cleansed for the success of the Zionist project”.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, “Israel created policies to reduce the number of Palestinians in the land, including the number of Christians”.<sup>57</sup>

The author also points to Zionism as the primary origin of chaos and violence in the Middle East, whose inception disrupted the balance of inter-communal relations that was in effect until the Zionists began implementing the project of Jewish statehood.

Ateek does not romanticize the past, admitting there was inter-communal violence stemming from economical, personal, and religious disputes, but it was limited and regulated by a social order that existed before Jewish immigration, and which Zionism completely disrupted.

The beginning of havoc is deemed to be the Balfour Declaration, which committed to create a Jewish national home in the British-administered region called Palestine. Moreover, “the increase of Jewish immigration into Palestine, both legally and illegally, brought an increase in violence. The violence of the Zionists was met with the reactionary violence of the Palestinians as they defended their rights to their land and country from the onslaught of the recent arrivals”.<sup>58</sup>

Not only would Zionism be the essence of chaos and injustice, but also it bears the germ of ferocity and brutality that modern Israel is accused of. In Ateek’s view, “Zionists were using violence and terrorism unashamedly to achieve their goals,” and in the effort of creating “a state for themselves, they used violence—brutally, viciously, and relentlessly”.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, seeking to dismiss Zionism as a corrupted and inhumane movement, the author compares it to modern violence in the region,

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the late 1960s in South America, and later evolved in different contexts of oppression and discrimination, as a theological tool for signifying the scripture in light of injustice and as a means of mobilization of marginalized masses.

<sup>51</sup> See (Ateek 1989, p. 97).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 92–100, at p. 93.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>54</sup> See (Ateek 2014, pp. 123–35).

<sup>55</sup> See (Ateek 2007, pp. 67–74, at p. 74).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>58</sup> See (Naim 2008, p. 40).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

which he, however, condones, stating that “in no way were the Zionists morally superior to Palestinian extremists who today use violence and terror to achieve the liberation of their country”.<sup>60</sup>

This violent nature is deemed to have passed on to Israel, which is also uncompromisingly condemned as a genocidal state, maintaining that the “belief that Palestinians are worth less than Jews, hidden in the hearts of some Zionists, began to be put into practice over the time. It has been a sallow and creeping genocide.”<sup>61</sup> Ateek goes so far as to suggest that today’s Israel also employs practices of Nazi Germany as a result of a progressive degeneration of its attitudes toward Palestinians.<sup>62</sup>

The condemnation of Zionism is strengthened by the contention that it is a colonialist endeavor. Zionists are estranged as foreign settlers who allegedly took over the rule of the region as proxies of Western imperialist powers, in particular America. Palestinians suffer the collusion of imperialist, colonialist forces that enact different forms of oppression.

According to Ateek, “the state of Israel has become an integral part of American Empire” and “in its hegemony over the Palestinians and its use of military prowess it governs and behaves as an Empire.”<sup>63</sup> The author describes Zionism as an imperialist tool deployed for achieving the oppression of the Palestinians in such a fashion that theology becomes a fundamental component of the justification of violence and injustice. “The Zionists replaced the traditional biblical God with the new god of Zionism,”<sup>64</sup> a theological operation whereby “they adopted a literal understanding of an exclusive biblical tribal god who commands the expulsion and destruction of the indigenous people of the land.”<sup>65</sup> Ateek maintains that Israel’s new god is security,<sup>66</sup> dismissing any genuine concern that Israel has in front of military and security challenged for guaranteeing the security of its citizens. In his view, Israel’s militarism is yet another tool for exterminating Palestinians mantled by theological arguments.

Moreover, in occasion of the centenary of the 1917 Balfour Declaration in 2017, through which the British Empire committed to support the creation of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, Ateek expresses his most profound condemnation of Balfour’s views and the Declaration bearing his name. In his view, Balfour “made it possible for the Israeli government to dominate, dehumanize, and discriminate against the Palestinians.”<sup>67</sup> The condemnation is not only political, because “in a theological sense, the sin of Balfour was his failure to practice the love of neighbor.”<sup>68</sup> In this way, Ateek repurposes the same political–theological argument set forth against Zionism, in order to attack what is considered the primary international document that constitutes the legal basis of Israel’s legitimacy.

The following passage maybe best illustrates the author’s views on Zionism and Israel as by-products of an imperialist scheme:

“Today we can trace the varied forces that coalesced to bring about the tragedy of Palestine and ignite the original spark of the violence back to colonialism and imperialism, to poor and misguided biblical scholarship, to a Christian Europe that made Jews unwanted and carried out massacres and pogroms against them, to a Zionist movement that capitalized on the spirit of colonialism, for its own advantage, and to some influential Protestant evangelicals who used the scripture to support Zionist objectives while ignoring issues of justice and self-determination for the indigenous people of Palestine who had been living there for

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 47. The author refers to the use of dogs by Israeli military forces and claims that “for many years, Israel refused to use trained dogs against the Palestinians because it brought to mind the Nazis. Now Israel uses dogs to attack Palestinians”.

<sup>63</sup> See (Ateek 2012, pp. 93–105, at p. 94).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., particularly where the author uses the Hebrew word “bitahon”, spelled in the piece as “betahone”.

<sup>67</sup> See (Ateek 2017).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



millennia, In retrospect, it was a conspiracy to displace innocent people from their land and to replace them with another people. Is it surprising that violence ensued?"<sup>69</sup>

### 2.3. Mitri Raheb

Other theologians mainly focus their work on Israel as an imperialist project, arguing that Israel has occupied the land of indigenous Palestinians and built an empire whose goal would be persistently negating Palestinian rights in pursuit of expansionist and colonialist plans.

While accusations of colonialism and imperialism are not new in the discourse on the conflict, the theologian approach is particularly interesting because it revises biblical history and adapts it to the current situation in a fashion that associates the State of Israel with foreign empires that in the past have ruled on the area called "holy land."

Such analogies taken from the biblical narrative include the comparison of Israel to the Egyptian Empire and the Pharaoh. The enslaved Hebrews and oppressed Jews come to represent the oppressed masses, which are nowadays Palestinians. Another analogy equates between the State of Israel and the Roman Empire, particularly expedient for the Christian narrative. Hence, the crucifixion of Jesus as the ultimate example of a criminal misdeed by the ruling regime becomes a tool for obliterating Jesus' Jewish identity and using him as the embodiment of today's Palestinian collective, persecuted at the hand of what is deemed ferocious Israeli rule.

Mitri Raheb proposes new biblical hermeneutics, which are based on the replacement of modern Israel as a Jewish state with an imperialist entity to be associated with, alternatively, the Babylonians, the historical regime of Herod, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and the Crusaders' rule. In his view, these regimes occupied a territory by controlling natural resources, limiting people's movement, building settlements, and uprooting people to exile, and Israel would act in their footsteps.<sup>70</sup>

Raheb develops a political reading of the biblical narrative that re-signifies historical groups, by substituting them with contemporary political players in the Arab–Israeli conflict. While the Scriptures is often used to signify a specific historical or political context in the tradition of contextualized theology, the problematic aspect of this specific reading is the conclusion that the author draws, which is the alienation of Israel and the Jewish people from the regional context. In other words, it is not the hermeneutical exercise that is under scrutiny here, or its validity, but the conclusions it gets to, which promote a vision of Jewish Israel as an alien entity in the region.

Israel is nominated in the "list of empires that ruled Palestine: the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Crusaders, the Ayyubids, the Ottomans, the British, and last but not the least, the Israeli occupation."<sup>71</sup> The Palestinian fighters take the place of Jewish rebels that fought against the Roman Empire, assuming the role of the liberator against an unjust regime. Additionally, the Muslim Brotherhood takes the place of the Pharisees, the Jewish religious establishment at Jesus' time; while the ruling Palestinian elites take the place of the Sadducees, the Jewish political elite. Tellingly, the Palestinians who work with or for Israelis are defined as the Jewish tax collectors at the service of the Roman Empire, denigrated as collaborators of the oppressor. Finally, Muslim Salafists and conservative Christian churches take the place of the Qumran community.<sup>72</sup>

This creative interpretation of the scripture obliterates the Jewish meaning of the biblical narrative, by replacing it with a contextual nationalist Palestinian narrative of oppression.

As Raheb urges, "we have to connect the Israel of the Bible with the Palestinians, because they are our forefathers, and we must connect the modern state of Israel with the Empire."<sup>73</sup> Through this interpretation, Israel becomes an alien entity that rules over the Palestinian indigenous people. Such a

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<sup>69</sup> See (Naim 2008, p. 39).

<sup>70</sup> See (Raheb 2014a, pp. 55–62).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74–81.

<sup>73</sup> See (Raheb 2012, p. 51–55, at p. 54).



substituting narrative is at times supported by geographical arguments, since, as Raheb asserts, “Had we lived at the time of Jesus, and had we seen all the military checkpoints that Herod the Great created; or if we look from Bethlehem today towards the East and the South and see Herodian and Masada, the extent of the Roman Empire at the time would be obvious.”<sup>74</sup>

The total dismissal of Israel as an imperialist project is also supported by the view that the ideology behind it, namely, Zionism, uses the bible in order to justify injustice and oppression.<sup>75</sup> Zionism and Israel represent the ultimate evil that are subjugating the holy land as other rulers had done in history.

The imagery used is at times vitriolic. Interpreting the Gospel of Matthew, which recounts Jesus’s transfiguration and healing of a boy possessed by a demon, Raheb speaks of demonic powers as “a perfect symbol for the empire”<sup>76</sup> that subjugates people’s lives.

In this respect, the author cites chapter 17 of the Gospel of Matthew, which recounts the transfiguration of Jesus, a central event in the Gospel narrative. Talking from what has been identified as Mount Tabor, Jesus appears to the disciples James, John, and Peter as the Son of God. The event plays a fundamental role in ascertaining Jesus’s dual nature as human and divine. Moreover, the Gospel tells that Jesus healed a man possessed by a demon, which the author interprets as the oppression and despair of people under imperial regimes.

The process of liberation from demonic powers becomes for the author a metaphor for the empowerment of masses in order to oppose oppression. The metaphor of the crucifixion is sometimes used in order to exemplify oppression, whereby the Palestinian people embodies Jesus crucified by “the Empire”.<sup>77</sup> As strong as this image may be, especially in a Christian context, it also restores old debates strongly connected to the antisemitic notion of deicide.

Not only is Israel responsible for the situation that Palestinians live in, but it also should be considered responsible for religious fundamentalism worldwide. According to Raheb, the imperialist plan of Zionism has been addressed theologically by Christians first, and then by Jews, who both saw in the victory of the 1967 War a divine attestation of Israel’s legitimacy. The author is of the opinion that the year 1967 is the fulcrum of religious fundamentalism, whereby Christian and Jewish theological understanding of the events, which substantially endorsed Zionism, triggered Islamic fundamentalism as a response. Israel’s military policy would then be the reason for all religious extremism in the world.<sup>78</sup>

By portraying Israel as a wicked, even demonic, empire, it follows that there is no good or right in it. Israelis are reduced to cruel soldiers, whose dominion of the land is supported by foreign powers. Raheb’s *Bethlehem Besieged* can help understand how Israelis are perceived.

Written in 2004, the book recounts the 2002 Bethlehem incident, which saw the Israeli army confronting Palestinian militants who took harbor in the Church of Nativity. The images of Israeli tanks settled out of the Church outraged the Christian world. Conversely, the use of a worship place as a refuge by belligerent groups was not unanimously condemned. Raheb describes the fear and uncertainty during Israel’s military operation in the city of Bethlehem. While the author can find humanity among the militants, he denies any compassion on the Israeli side. Even the politeness found in one Israeli commander described in the book was dismissed as a simple behavior upon orders, and not as a real kindness. On the contrary, when speaking of a Hamas militant who was in the Church and was later exiled to Gaza by Israel, he describes his compassionate attitude toward the Christian monk who provided food for those hiding.<sup>79</sup>

The numerous pages that describe Israel’s brutality, humiliating military policies, and consequences of the war assume a theological understanding when the author refers to Saul-Paul and his embracing

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>75</sup> See (Raheb 2012, pp. 65–111).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>77</sup> See for instance, the speech given in March 2014 (Raheb 2014b).

<sup>78</sup> See the speech given at the 2014 Christ at the Checkpoint Conference organized by the Bethlehem Bible College in March 2014, (Raheb 2014c).

<sup>79</sup> See (Mitri 2004).

of the Christian message. When using his Hebrew name Saul, his figure is an analogy of Israel: “this former Jewish leader, zealot, persecutor, and hard-liner committed himself to making sure that a wall of separation was built and kept between his community and its enemies. He was ready to attack, terrorize, and even sanction the killing of whoever dared to question the importance of this wall for the security of his community”.<sup>80</sup> The wall is understandably a reference to the fence that Israel began building in 2002 roughly along the 1949 armistice line, but also becomes an allegory of Israel’s purported ideological isolation, whereby the author states that “for Saul the ideological wall of separation was necessary to preserve his people’s identity, demography, and security”. Only after embracing the Christian message, Saul becomes Paul, a peacemaker, a universalist lover whose “great discovery was that God in Christ broke the walls of hostility between the human and the divine,” tearing down the need of national, cultural, or communal divisions.<sup>81</sup>

This reference suggests how Israel’s perceived nationalistic goals of self-separation are directly challenged by the Christian message of universal love: yet another rendition of the juxtaposing forces of Jewish particularism, expressed in Israel’s closeness, and Christian universalism, expressed in Palestinian piety.

### 3. Anti-Israeli or Anti-Jewish Tenets?

The analyzed theologians eloquently advocate for the Palestinians’ plight for independence and see in Israel the worldly result of a distorted theology that abuses the biblical message in order to justify a nationalistic project. The opposition to the Zionist project combines harsh criticism of Israel’s policies in the conflict as well as the pursuit of a political alternative that entails the transformation of the Jewish state into another reality.

It is unclear whether this alternative would be bi-national state or the transformation of Israel only into a pluri-national state. However, these positions do not imply, apparently, any direct hostility toward the Jewish people. Their controversial aspect lies in the arguments put forth to support the demise of the Jewish state. They do not criticize the nation-state as a polity *per se*, nor do they criticize specific policies toward minorities. They focus on the entire Zionist project that supposedly creates a reality that clashes with the concept of divine justice, ending with the refusal of Jewish statehood.

The Jewish Zionist narrative is built on biblical history for reviving Jewish national identity. Israel draws from Judaism, both Jewish religion and tradition, in order to establish a polity that reflects Jewish cultural and spiritual heritage. In the effort to oppose the Zionist enterprise, the alternative formulated is not a polity that reflects Arab cultural and spiritual heritage, nor an Arab national project that may conflict with the existence of Israel. The arguments set forth seek to reject Jewish statehood in its entirety, since it allegedly clashes with Christian tenets. The point is made using theological and biblical arguments and references, and it directly opposes Israel because its Jewish, not because it has not yet brokered peace with the Palestinians and not because it has not adopted more favorable policies toward its minorities. Israel’s existence as a Jewish state is presented as incompatible with Christian tenets, and its unfolding is deemed to be a wicked entity.

The first of these arguments is the accusation of particularism, whereby Israel would be a polity based on Jewish exclusivism drawn from a tribal conceptualization of god. The alternative proposed is a Christian view of inclusiveness, to be found in the biblical prophets and above-all in the teachings of Jesus. This view is highly troublesome, because it reproduces, theologically, the ancient tenets of Christianity as superseding Judaism, and, culturally, the anti-Jewish idea that regards Jews as a self-isolating group unable to open to diversity or togetherness.

Even more vexing is the second argument, whereby the Israeli polity is a form of empire. Questioning Israel’s rule and policies in the post-1967 territories, the writings of these theologians end

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 145–46.

up contributing to the revival of other antisemitic views. When Ateek argues that “Israel has become an integral part of American Empire and . . . behaves like and empire” by wilding “hegemony over the Palestinians”<sup>82</sup> he also maintains that its legitimizing force is the Bible, which “has been used as an instrument of injustice and oppression” for vindicating the “theft of land of Palestine”.<sup>83</sup> Troublesome as it may be, this argument is used not only to further Israel’s demonization, but also for construing Zionism as an inherently evil enterprise that opposes God’s will.

These arguments have attracted the support of a number of international Christian leaders and activists as well. For instance, Anno denounces that the holy land was promised as “a sanctuary of the poor and the oppressed,”<sup>84</sup> not as a national project of one people, entailing, therefore, that the Jewish State defies divine will. In such a view, Israel is the ultimate evil that has to be resisted and combated. This situation of injustice requires a Christian response, rooted in a “concept of God who stands beside the oppressed and with whom the oppressed work for a better day and confront their oppressors with their sin.”<sup>85</sup>

The third argument is the substitution and alienation of the Jews from the region and from the biblical narrative. If Israel is an imperialist enterprise, it is yet another regime that rules over the region and vexing its population. Here, the attempt is not only to invalidate the Zionist reading of the biblical narrative, but it endeavors to replace biblical Jews with today’s Palestinians. The slogan often used by activists “Israelis do not belong here,” assumes far-reaching consequences when transposed in a biblical context.

For instance, in a neo-Marxist reading of the Gospel of Mark, Myers describes Jesus as acquainted with the working class of time, especially with fishers, among whom he preached against the Roman oppressor and the Jewish ruling elite, beginning a mission of mobilization “to join him in overturning the structures of power and privilege . . . in order to restore God’s justice to the poor.”<sup>86</sup> Jesus’ prophetic message is substantiated in his attempt to renew religious attachment by politically engaging against Roman hegemony in order to liberate the oppressed masses, and Jesus’ revolutionary spirit becomes the essence of discipleship. In the attempt to contextualize this liberationist analysis, insurrectionary Jesus is associated with current movements of opposition to Israeli military and police forces, whereby modern Palestinian popular resistance replaces Jewish revolt to Roman authorities.<sup>87</sup> Jesus himself becomes a “Palestinian under imperial rule,”<sup>88</sup> whose engagement in non-violent resistance turns into a model for Christians today. As Wistrich emphasizes, the “image of the crucified Jewish people and of the Nazis as a metaphor of the eternal essence of evil has boomeranged against Jews with a vengeance”, because Jews’ moral terrain has been corrupted by Zionism and its military and power politics and, consequently, “they have been endlessly execrated for ‘crucifying’ the Palestinian people in the Holy Land”.<sup>89</sup>

This view perpetuates the image of the Jew as a perennial victim of oppression and the ultimate victim of Nazi ideology. Hence, Jews are repository of God’s will. On the contrary, Zionism promotes exactly the opposite: a national movement of liberation that not only has given rise to a polity, but also inspires its military ethos. Therefore, Zionism is irreconcilable with such a Christian understanding.

Moreover, it is worth noting that while Israel is portrayed as a colonialist project endeavored by “foreigners,” meaning evidently European Jews who settled in the region in pursuit of the Zionism dream, there is no mention of those Jews who nowadays inhabit Israel and who are not of European descent. The categorization of Israel as a Western imperialist state fails to address the issue of the so-called Mizrahi

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<sup>82</sup> See (Ateek 2012, p. 94).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>84</sup> See (Anno 2011, pp. 47–51, at p. 48). The paper is a collection of speeches given at the 2011 conference “Kairos for Global Justice,” which took place in Bethlehem. The texts are available at: <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/files/Kairos%20for%20Global%20Justice.pdf>.

<sup>85</sup> See (Ateek 1989, p. 134).

<sup>86</sup> See (Myers 2012, pp. 106–15, at p. 113).

<sup>87</sup> See (Horsley 2012, pp. 56–85, at pp. 63–64).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

<sup>89</sup> See (Wistrich 2010, p. 502).

Jews, who arrived in Israel as the result of mass emigration, forced or motivated by policies enacted by numerous Arab and Muslims states following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

The authors who have been analyzed apparently distinguish Judaism from Zionism and focus primarily on the latter. Their accusations are for the most directed against Zionism and not against the Judaism. Nevertheless, it is clear that Zionist Jews are the addressee of their speculation, which portrays Israel as inhabited by foreigners and associates it with imperialist powers. This distinction is futile when it comes to the antisemitic tropes such as Jewish particularism, Jewish obsolete legalism, and Jewish evil, which echo in the arguments put forward against Zionism. This is even more true, if one thinks that the object of their dispute is not Zionist policies toward Arabs, nor Jewish theologies that support Zionism, but rather Zionism as a Jewish national project.

The object of their dispute is Zionism as a Jewish political expression that gave birth to a Jewish polity. As a matter of fact, these theologians do not reject nationalism, national identity, or the idea of nation State as a whole. Indeed, they identify as proud Arab and Palestinians and support Arab and Palestinian nationalism. They rather focus on Jewish nationhood and statehood as a historical manifestation that they deem contrary to justice and the divine order. Even if we consider these authors' condemnation of Israel's policies in the post-1967 territories, or the rebuttal of Israel's stances in the conflict, which are commonly criticized, the problem persists in the arguments that are put forward, and that focus more on the essence of Jewish statehood rather than on a specific policies or military practice deemed incompatible with international standards.

This is even more evident when one considers how these authors use Christian figures and principles in order to describe the conflict.

The identification of Palestinians with the crucified Jesus results in a replacement that goes beyond the simple biblical narrative. Indeed, "such views revive the antisemitism of traditional Christian replacement theology, negating the legitimacy of an independent Jewish *political* existence in Zion."<sup>90</sup> The estrangement of Jews as foreign imperialists seems to go beyond the condemnation of Israeli policies deemed as a colonialist plan on Palestinian lands. Indeed, the use of the Biblical narrative against Israel fathoms the substitution of Palestinians with Biblical Israelites, and result in the shaping of a new supersession, that in a theological-political fashion substitutes the current Zionist Jews with Palestinians. In an effort to disprove Zionist claims to the land rooted in Jewish identity and its connection to the Land of Israel, certain arguments lead to a different conclusion, whereby the true heirs of such connection would be Palestinians. Hence, Zionist Jewish claims would be voided by the misinterpretation and abuse of the Bible stemming from exclusivist readings. This view echoes yet another anti-Jewish belief of replacement theology, which deemed Christians as the true Israel and considered the advent of Jesus as implying the invalidation of Judaism.

As Merkley eloquently observes,

"Marcion has won his long-postponed victory—not only in the local Christian communities of the Middle East, where the prevailing anti-Israeli spirit makes it seem politically astute to deny the God of Israel, but in ecumenical Christian circles, where political correctness has made the intellectuals and bureaucrats increasingly sensitive to the mindset of the oppressed Palestinians, and increasingly insensitive to the demands of dogmatic theology and historical truth."<sup>91</sup>

Seemingly, the underlining contention is that Israel is all wrong: it emanates from a distorted theology; it represents a corrupt political vision; it perpetuates brutality and oppression; it gave rise to religious extremism and political instability; it embodies imperial schemes and demoniac forces.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., emphasis in original.

<sup>91</sup> See (Merkley 2001, pp. 79–80). Marcion of Sinope was active in the 2nd century C.E. and maintained that Christians should limit themselves to the New Testament given that the advent of Jesus replaced the community of Israel and its covenant with god. Consequently, the Old Testament has been invalidated in light of the new scripture (the New Testament on the making at the time).

If the political narrative aims to reject the Jewish State in pursuit of larger national aspirations over the territories that are now administered by Israel as well as on the territory that is part of sovereign Israel, the use of theological arguments fosters a treacherous intellectual climate. The peril here is not merely “demonizing Israel,” but rather it is nurturing antisemitic stereotypes that indirectly serve the political discourse against Zionism and Jewish statehood.

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Article

# Religiosity, Religious Practice, and Antisemitism in Present-Day Hungary

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**Abstract:** Since 1995, surveys on antisemitism using national representative samples have been regularly carried out in Hungary. In this article, we used data from the 2011 and 2017 surveys to explore the relationship between three types of antisemitism, namely religious, secular, and emotional. Moreover, we scrutinized how different religiosity indicators can be used as explanatory variables for the different types of antisemitism. We found a slight increase in religious and secular antisemitism between 2011 and 2017, while emotional antisemitism remained almost the same. Religious anti-Judaism significantly correlated with both secular and emotional antisemitism, however, its relationship was much stronger with the former. When analyzing the relationship between different types of antisemitism and religiosity indicators, we found that while in 2011, all the indicators were connected to religious, and most of them to secular and emotional antisemitism, in 2017, only the variables measuring subjective self-classification remained significant. The results show that the relationship between religion and antisemitism underwent some substantial changes between 2011 and 2017. While in 2011, personal religiosity was a significant predictor of the strength of antisemitism, in 2017, religion serving as a cultural identity marker took over this function. The hypothetical explanatory factor for the change is the rebirth of the “Christian-national” idea appearing as the foundational element of the new Hungarian constitution, according to which Christian culture is the ultimate unifying force of the nation, giving the inner essence and meaning of the state. In this discourse, being Christian is equated with being Hungarian. Self-declared and self-defined Christian religiosity plays the role of a symbolic marker for accepting the national-conservative identity discourse and belonging to the “Christian-national” cultural-political camp where antisemitic prejudices occur more frequently than in other segments of the society.

**Keywords:** antisemitism; religiosity; Hungary; quantitative analysis

## 1. Introduction

In Hungary, surveys on antisemitism carried out regularly since 1995 show that—often contrary to the perceptions of observers—the share of antisemites among the adult Hungarian population barely changed between 1995 and 2006.<sup>1</sup> The percentage of antisemites among the Hungarian population was

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to define the exact number of Jews in Hungary. However, based on demographic data the estimation for the number of *halachically* Jewish persons (e.g., having Jewish mother) in Hungary was between 58,936 and 110,679 in 2015. That is 0.6% and 1.1% of the total population, respectively. Based on this data and the proportion of intermarriages, in 2015 approximately minimum 73,000 and maximum 138,000 persons had at least one Jewish parent, which corresponds to 0.7 and 1.4% of the total population (Kovács and Barna 2018, pp. 12–13). There are three major Christian denomination in Hungary: the Catholic, the Reformed, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. According to the census in 2011, 54% of those answering the question declared themselves as Catholic, 16 as Reformed, and 3% as Evangelical Lutheran.



roughly the same throughout the period 1995–2002 (removed for peer-review). However, after moderate growth in the following years, in 2010, a sudden jump in the proportion of antisemites could be observed (Table 1).

**Table 1.** The percentage of antisemites among the Hungarian adult population, 2006–2017.

	Extreme Antisemites	Moderate Antisemites	Non-Antisemites/Unclassified
2006	18	16	66
2017	26	10	64

The results indicate that while the proportion of non-antisemites remained almost constant, the proportion of extreme antisemites significantly grew, which could be the result of the radicalization of the previously moderate antisemitic group.

The surveys mentioned above tried to map the cognitive components of the antisemitic prejudices, among them the presence of traditional religious anti-Jewish contents. In this article, we analyzed two datasets provided by two large-scale surveys (2011 and 2017) on representative national samples of the Hungarian adult population. By using the same questionnaires, both surveys measured not only the strength and tenacity of antisemitic prejudices, but, at the same time, the level of religiosity, forms, and frequency of religious practices, and the denominational affiliation of the subjects. In the analysis, we examined three types of antisemitism: religious, secular, and emotional. The main question the article aimed to answer was whether different religiosity indicators could be used as significant explanatory variables for the different types of antisemitism in the present-day Hungarian society.

## 2. Results of Previous Research

Empirical sociological studies have demonstrated, on more than one occasion, the continued existence of traditional Christian anti-Judaism and religiously based antisemitism in modern societies. In the *United States*, several surveys demonstrated that religious attitudes could partly explain the acceptance of secular antisemitic views. The connection between these two sets of attitudes was already explored in the seminal research on authoritarianism of Adorno and his colleagues (Adorno et al. 1969, pp. 208–21). They investigated the correlation between antisemitism/ethnocentrism and religious affiliation, the parents' religious affiliation, church attendance, the importance of religion and church to the subjects and certain fundamentalist religious beliefs, and they found that "gross, objective factors—denomination and frequency of church attendance—were less significant for prejudice than certain psychological trends reflected in the way the subject accepted or rejected religion and in the content of his religious ideology" (Adorno et al. 1969, p. 221). In the following decades, further research proved the correlation between Christian religious fundamentalism and antisemitism (Glock and Stark 1966; Quinley and Glock 1979; Heinz and Geiser 1988).

Newer investigations on antisemitism in *Germany* indicated a weak connection between Christian religiosity and anti-Jewish prejudice. According to the antisemitism report of the German Bundestag which summarized the results of several empirical investigations (2017), though 14% of the adult population agreed with the statement that Jews are responsible for Christ's death, the impact of religiosity on secular antisemitism is low: church membership, denominational attachment and the level of religiosity do not correlate significantly with the variables measuring antisemitism. However, researchers found significant correlations between Christian fundamentalist beliefs and antisemitism.

Beate Küpper, in her secondary analysis of data stemming from a large-scale survey on group-focused enmity in Germany (2007), found only a weak correlation between the (self-declared) level of religiosity and antisemitism. On a four-point antisemitism scale, the very religious (1.7) and the not-at-all religious (1.8) groups scored somewhat higher than the others (Küpper 2010).

An international comparative analysis of the relationship between religion and antisemitism brought similar results. In his analysis of the World Values Survey data-set<sup>2</sup>, Arno Tausch (2018) investigated the correlation between the extent of antisemitism and the extent to which respondents attach importance to religion in their life in 28 countries. He found that the importance of religion correlated significantly with the rejection of a Jewish neighbor, however, when he examined in detail the intricate relationship between religion and antisemitism, he found that the relationship between the belief in God and antisemitism is close to zero, while between fundamentalist dogma (belief in heaven, belief in hell, belief in reincarnation) and antisemitism is clearly significant.

The first comparative study on antisemitism in the *post-Communist region* which contained a question on religious antisemitism was carried out in 1995 by researchers of the University of Vienna (Weiss and Reinprecht 1998, p. 85). According to the results presented in Table 2, rejection of Jews on religious grounds was the strongest in Poland and equally strong in Hungary and in the successor countries of former Czechoslovakia.

**Table 2.** Measurement of religious antisemitism (percentage and average)<sup>1</sup>.

	1	2	3	4	Average
<b>As Christians, we should reject the Jews</b>					
Hungary	3	7	21	69	3.6
Czechs	3	6	26	65	3.5
Slovaks	3	6	24	67	3.6
Poland	4	9	29	58	3.4

<sup>1</sup> 1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree.

In the last three decades, after the fall of the Communist system, a series of empirical investigations were conducted in Poland in order to explore the structure of contemporary antisemitic beliefs. They discriminated two forms of antisemitism: traditional and modern. Traditional antisemitism was defined as a direct descendant of Christian anti-Judaism expressed by the acceptance of statements about Jewish deicide or blood libel accusation. The results of the first waves of research gave some cause for moderate optimism: the researchers found that the traditional forms of antisemitism occur mainly among older and less educated citizens and residents of rural areas as opposed to city-dwellers (Krzeminski 1993; Krzeminski 2002).

In 2009, the Center for Research on Prejudice of the University of Warsaw conducted a survey on a national representative sample, consisting of measures of both types of antisemitism (Bilewicz et al. 2013). The results concerning traditional antisemitism confirmed former findings. It seemed so that the traditional religious forms of antisemitism are losing ground in Poland. The results showed that traditional forms of antisemitism are shared only by a small percent of the Polish population: 78.5% of participants scored below the mid-point of the religious antisemitism-scale, i.e., disagreed with traditional antisemitic statements. Those who supported statements expressing religious antisemitism were mostly people living outside of big cities, less educated, older, and with lower income.

However, the results of the third wave of the Polish Prejudice Survey conducted on a representative sample of Poles in 2017 show a different picture (Bulska and Winiewski 2018). Forty percent of the respondents agreed (scores 5 and 4 on a five-grade agreement-scale) with the statement that contemporary Jews, too, are responsible for the death of Christ, and that 27% with the statement that Jews had been kidnapping Christian children in the past. The researchers compared these results with data stemming from previous surveys and found that the strength of traditional religious-based antisemitism in Poland has been gradually rising for the last several years. Both items received stronger

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>.

support than before, for example, in 2009 a little over 13% of the respondents agreed fully (score 5) with the first statement regarding the responsibility of contemporary Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, whereas in 2017, this number was over 14 percentage points higher. It is worth noting that religious antisemitism significantly correlated with the secular form of antisemitism.

The first empirical studies on antisemitism in post-Communist *Hungary* already aimed at identifying the religious components of antisemitic prejudices. The researchers repeatedly used two items for this purpose: the subjects were asked about their agreement or disagreement with statements concerning the deicide and its consequences. Although the scale used in the 1995 survey (two-grade agreement scale) was not identical with the ones used in 1994 and 2002 (four-grade agreement scale), the results are somewhat comparable (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Anti-Judaism in 1994, 1995, and 2002 (percentage).

	Year	Fully Agree	Partially Agree	Partially Disagree	Fully Disagree	Do not Know	Average (SD)
The crucifixion of Jesus is the unforgivable sin of the Jews.	1994	15	11	20	34	20	2.11 (1.15)
	1995		23		55	22	
	2002	8	9	18	35	30	1.87 (1.04)
The suffering of the Jewish people was God's punishment.	1994	12	12	19	37	20	1.99 (1.10)
	1995		17		58	25	
	2002	7	10	18	37	28	1.84 (1.02)

The survey conducted by András Kovács in 1995 offered a chance for a detailed analysis of the issue (Kovács 2011, pp. 60–64, 97, 111–13; Hack 2001). As Table 3 indicates, 17%–26% of the sample agreed with the statement about the responsibility for the deicide, and 17%–24% accepted that the historical suffering of Jews was God's punishment for their sins. The analysis of the results showed that agreement with the two statements was significantly higher among those who were strictly religious and attended church services at least once a week. While church membership and denominational differences did not significantly influence the acceptance of these religious anti-Jewish statements, among the strict believers, a significant difference occurred between the Protestants who accepted significantly more frequently the two statements than the Catholics.

Table 4 shows that the relationship between religiosity and secular antisemitism<sup>3</sup> is similar to the structure described above: strict religiosity and frequency of church attendance have a significant relationship with secular antisemitism, but church membership and denominational affiliation do not, however, as detailed analysis has proved, strictly religious Protestants are significantly more antisemitic than strictly religious Catholics in this case too.

<sup>3</sup> The composite measure of antisemitism was formed in a complex way. The measure combined the secular items of cognitive antisemitism with the measure of its emotional intensity. For more, see (Kovács 2011, pp. 40–48).

**Table 4.** Indicators of religiosity by the strength of antisemitism in 1995 (percentage).

	Non-Antisemites	Moderate Antisemites	Extreme Antisemites
Full sample	71	20	9
<b>I am religious</b>			
Rather yes	69	22	9
Rather no	75	15	10
<b>Strength of religious convictions</b>			
Strictly religious	65	26	9
Religious in my own way	71	20	10
Don't know whether I am religious	80	17	3
Not religious	76	15	9
Atheist	70	19	11
<b>Do you consider yourself a member of one of the churches?</b>			
Yes	71	20	9
No	73	18	9
<b>How often do you attend church?</b>			
Several times a week	56	36	8
Once a week	55	30	15
Once a month	80	12	8
Several times a year	76	18	6
Once a year	74	19	9
Never	70	19	11

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Data

In our present analysis, we used data from 2011 and 2017. Both surveys were designed by (Removed for peer-review) and carried out by Medián Public Opinion and Market Research Institute using PAPI (paper and pen interview) method. The 2011 survey was commissioned by the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, while the 2017 survey by the Budapest-based Action and Protection Foundation. The sample size of the representative national sample of the Hungarian adult population in 2011 was 1199, while in 2017, 1190. Both datasets were weighted by gender, age, educational level, and the type of settlement where the respondent lives. All the variables we used in our analysis were measured in the same way in both surveys.

#### 3.2. Dependent Variables

As stated earlier, we dealt with three types of antisemitism. Therefore, these are our dependent variables.

##### 3.2.1. Religiously Based Antisemitism

This measure of religiously based antisemitism was composed of two items, including the following statements: (1) "The crucifixion of Jesus is the unforgivable sin of the Jews" and "The sufferings of the Jews were God's punishment" Responses were measured on five-degree Likert-scales including the following possible responses: "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Neither agree, nor disagree", "Agree", "Strongly agree". An index was constructed by computing the mean value of the variables mentioned above. According to Eisinga et al. (2013), the Spearman-Brown statistic was used to access the reliability of the two-item scale. The value of the Spearman-Brown coefficient is 0.75 for 2011 and 0.74 for 2017, which is not excellent but acceptable. The minimum value of the created composite measure is 1, meaning that the respondent is religiously not antisemitic, while the maximum

value of 5 suggests the opposite. We also categorized the composite measure to differentiate between non-, moderately and extreme antisemites. We categorized those scoring between 1.00 and 2.50 as non-antisemites, those having scores between 2.51 and 3.75 as moderate antisemites, and those over 3.75 as extreme antisemites.

### 3.2.2. Secular Antisemitism

The measure of secular antisemitism was composed of five items where respondents had to report their agreement on five-degree Likert scales. Values of the Likert-scales had the same meaning as the previous ones. The items included the following statements: (1) "There is a secret Jewish conspiracy that determines political and economic processes"; (2) "Jews are more prone to using unethical means to achieve their goals than others"; (3) "Jews living in Hungary are more loyal to Israel than to this country"; (4) "It would be best if Jews left the country.", and (5) "In case of certain professions the number of Jews should be limited." As there were five items, we used Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the items. The values of Cronbach's alpha were 0.90 for both years, which suggest excellent reliability. The minimum value of the created composite measure was 1, meaning that the respondent can be described by the lack of secular antisemitism, while the maximum value of 5 suggests the opposite. We also categorized the measure into non-, moderately and extreme antisemites using the same thresholds as in the case of religiously based antisemitism.

### 3.2.3. Emotional Antisemitism

Emotional antisemitism was composed using two variables. The first was a nine-degree Likert scale where one meant that the respondent felt antipathy, while nine that s/he felt sympathy towards the Jews. In the second question, respondents had to choose from two options: whether they felt antipathy toward Jews or not. We combined these two variables. Those who said that they rather did not feel antipathy and scored on the emotional scale four or above were non-antisemites. While we counted as extreme antisemites those who rather felt antipathy toward Jews and had 1 to 5 value on the nine-degree Likert scale. We treated all the others (who had valid values on both variables) as moderate antisemites.

## 3.3. Independent Variables

In the analysis, we used three independent variables: religiosity, denomination, and strength of religious convictions.

### 3.3.1. Religious Self-Identity

Respondents were asked whether they felt religious or rather not.

### 3.3.2. Strength of Religious Convictions

This variable consisted of four categories: (1) Strictly religious, (2) Religious in my own way, (3) Don't know whether I am religious, (4) Not religious.

### 3.3.3. Church Membership

Respondents were asked whether they considered themselves or not a member of one of the churches.

### 3.3.4. Church Attendance

Respondents were asked about the frequency of their church attendance. This variable consisted of five categories: (1) At least once a week, (2) More than once a month, (3) Several times a year, (4) On family occasions and holidays; (5) Never.

#### 4. Results

Table 5 shows the distribution of the items measuring religious anti-Judaism in 2011 and 2017. In 2011, 20% of respondents agreed to some extent with the statement about the responsibility for the Holocaust, while in 2017 the respective proportion was 26%. In the case of the other statement about taking Jews' sufferings as God's punishment for their sins, the proportion of those who agreed was somewhat lower in both years. In 2011, 14% of respondents chose 4 or 5 on the five-degree Likert-scale, while in 2017, 17%. It is important to note that the proportion of those who did not answer the questions increased considerably between 2011 and 2017 for both statements.

Table 6 shows the distribution of the items measuring secular antisemitism in 2011 and 2017. The agreement with these items is much stronger than with those measuring religious anti-Judaism. Approximately one-third of the Hungarian population believed to some extent in a secret Jewish conspiracy in 2011. The proportion of these respondents was slightly lower, 29% in 2017. In 2011, approximately one-fourth of the population agreed with the statements that "Jews are more prone to using unethical means to achieve their goals than others" and "Jews living in Hungary are more loyal to Israel than to this country." Their proportion slightly increased by 2017. Compared to the previous statements, respondents were less prone to think that the best would be if Jews left the country. However, approximately one-fifth of the respondents agreed with this statement. There is one item where the proportion of those agreeing with it considerably increased. While in 2011, 19% thought that "in case of certain professions the number of Jews should be limited," their share increased to 27% by 2017. It is also important to note that the proportion of those not answering these questions was much higher than for the items measuring religious anti-Judaism.

Table 7 shows the distribution of the items measuring emotional antisemitism in 2011 and 2017. On a 1 to 9 scale, respondents found Jews slightly more sympathetic in 2017 (4.91) than in 2011 (4.61); however, the change is only slightly significant. When asked using a dichotomous variable, in both years, approximately one-fourth of the respondents said that they rather felt antipathy towards Jews. It is important to note that the proportion of those rejecting the answers to these questions was much lower than in the cases of the previous items.

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<sup>4</sup> All margins of error in this paper are calculated for a 95% confidence level.

Table 5. Items of anti-Judaism in 2011 and 2017 (percentage).

Year	Fully Agree	Partially Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Partially Disagree	Fully Disagree	Do not Know	Average (SD) (Margin of Error <sup>d</sup> of the Mean)
The crucifixion of Jesus is the unforgivable sin of the Jews.	2011 2017	9 13	11 13	19 21	10 14	39 23	2.32 (1.40) (0.08) 2.74 (1.40) (0.09)
The suffering of the Jewish people was God's punishment.	2011 2017	5 7	9 10	16 19	12 16	48 32	2.01 (1.27) (0.08) 2.33 (1.31) (0.08)

Table 6. Items of secular antisemitism in 2011 and 2017 (percentage).

Year	Fully Agree	Partially Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Partially Disagree	Fully Disagree	Do not Know	Average (SD) (Margin of Error of the Mean)
There is a secret Jewish conspiracy that determines political and economic processes.	2011 2017	14 13	19 16	25 22	7 13	15 15	3.12 (1.32) (0.08) 2.99 (1.34) (0.09)
Jews are more prone to using unethical means to achieve their goals than others.	2011 2017	9 12	16 17	25 20	13 17	22 16	2.73 (1.31) (0.08) 2.89 (1.35) (0.08)
Jews living in Hungary are more loyal to Israel than to this country.	2011 2017	12 12	15 19	29 21	11 14	13 11	3.00 (1.26) (0.08) 3.09 (1.27) (0.08)
It would be best if Jews left the country.	2011 2017	7 10	12 11	24 21	18 18	29 29	2.47 (1.29) (0.08) 2.50 (1.35) (0.00)
In the case of certain professions, the number of Jews should be limited.	2011 2017	7 12	12 15	25 20	11 13	37 29	2.36 (1.32) (0.08) 2.62 (1.42) (0.09)



**Table 7.** Items of emotional antisemitism in 2011 and 2017 (percentage).

	2011	2017
<b>Please, indicate on a 1 to 9 scale how sympathetic Jews are were 1 means that they are very antipathetic and 9 that they are very sympathetic.</b>		
1—very antipathetic	10	12
2	7	5
3	10	7
4	11	9
5	33	26
6	10	13
7	7	13
8	4	9
9—very sympathetic	4	3
Do not know	4	3
Mean	4.61	4.91
Standard Deviation	2.05	2.18
Margin of Error of the Mean	0.12	0.13
<b>Do you feel antipathy towards Jews?</b>		
Rather yes	24	25
Rather no	71	70
Do not know	5	5
Margin of error (percent)	2.52	2.55

Table 8 shows the distribution of all three types of antisemitism in 2011 and 2017. Looking at the data of religious anti-Judaism, in 2011, 19% of respondents were moderate, while 10% were extreme antisemites. By 2017, the proportion of the former remained almost the same, while the latter increased slightly by four percentage points. It is important to note that while in 2011, 16% of the respondents were unclassifiable, meaning that did not give a valid answer to at least one of those variables constituting the composite measure of religious anti-Judaism, in 2017, this proportion increased to 21%.

**Table 8.** Different types of antisemitism in 2011 and 2017 (percentage).

	2011	2017
<b>Religious anti-Judaism</b>		
Non-antisemites	55	45
Moderate antisemites	19	20
Extreme antisemites	10	14
Unclassifiable	16	21
<b>Secular antisemitism</b>		
Non-antisemites	27	25
Moderate antisemites	27	26
Extreme antisemites	16	19
Unclassifiable	30	30
<b>Emotional antisemitism</b>		
Non-antisemites	59	63
Moderate antisemites	13	8
Extreme antisemites	20	22
Unclassifiable	8	7

Table 8 shows that secular antisemitism was more widespread both in 2011 and 2017. While in 2011, 27% of the respondents were moderate and 16% extreme antisemites, in 2017, these proportions were 26% and 19%, respectively. The proportion of unclassifiable respondents was much higher than

in the case of religious anti-Judaism. This is not only because this composite variable was made of five variables and therefore there was a higher chance that a respondent did not have valid value on one of them but also attributable to the fact that respondents denied answering these variables with a higher chance, as we described above.

When looking at the distribution of emotional antisemitism, the most striking is the low proportion of unclassifiable respondents. It was below 10% in both years. According to emotional antisemitism, the proportion of moderate antisemites were 13% in 2011 and 8% in 2017, which are much lower than in the case of the other two types of antisemitism. The proportion of extreme antisemites were 20% in 2011 and 22% in 2017. These are much higher than in the case of religious anti-Judaism and somewhat higher than in the case of secular antisemitism.

Religious anti-Judaism and secular antisemitism were equally highly correlated in both years. In 2011, their correlation was 0.63, while in 2017, 0.67. In 2011, emotional antisemitism was just slightly more attached to secular antisemitism than to religious anti-Judaism. Its correlation with the former was 0.41, while with the latter, 0.33. However, the difference between the two increased. In 2017, the correlation between emotional antisemitism and secular antisemitism became much stronger ( $r = 0.58$ ) while with religious anti-Judaism remained almost the same ( $r = 0.39$ ).

In the next step of our analysis, we analyzed the relationship between the different indicators of religiosity (religious self-identity, the strength of religious convictions, church membership, and church attendance) and the different types of antisemitism, namely religious, secular, and emotional. The distributions of these religiosity indicators remained stable between 2011 and 2017, as Table 9 indicates. A little more than half of the respondents considered themselves as religious in both years. It is clear that this self-identification does not coincide with strict religiosity as the proportion of the later is just approximately 10% of the population. When asked about the strength of their religious convictions, half of the respondents answered that they were religious in their own way, while approximately one-third of respondent said that they were not religious. The proportion of those considering themselves as members of one of the churches little exceeded 40% in both years. However, attending church services regularly was quite rare.

However, it is interesting to analyze how the relationship between religious self-identity and the other types of religious indicators changed from 2011 to 2017. The ones who were strictly religious or religious in their own way considered themselves as religious in both years. However, in 2017, religious self-identification was less typical for the strictly religious group and more for those who were religious in their own way. Besides that, both the relationship between religious self-identification and church membership, as well as between religious self-identification and church attendance weakened considerably from 2011 to 2017.<sup>5</sup>

In 2011, all indicators of religiosity had a significant relationship with *religious anti-Judaism*, while in 2017, only religious self-identity and the strength of religious convictions. In both years, those who said that they were religious proved to be much more prone to antisemitism, both in its moderate and extreme forms. In 2011, 31% of the self-identified religious respondents were moderate antisemites and 20% extreme antisemites, the respective numbers for those not feeling themselves religious were only 16% and 6%. In 2017, 30% of those having religious self-identity were moderate antisemites and 26% extreme antisemites, while the respective numbers for those not feeling themselves religious were 20% and 12% (Table 10).

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<sup>5</sup> The Cramer's Vs for the relationship between religious self-identity and church membership in 2011 was 0.41, while in 2017 0.28. The Cramer's Vs for the relationship between religious self-identity and church attendance in 2011 was 0.49, while in 2017, 0.35.

**Table 9.** Indicators of religiosity in 2011 and 2017 (percentage).

	2011	2017
<b>I am religious</b>		
Rather yes	53	55
Rather no	45	43
Missing data	2	3
<b>Strength of religious convictions</b>		
Strictly religious	11	12
Religious in my own way	49	49
Don't know whether I am religious	6	7
Not religious	31	29
Missing data	3	4
<b>Do you consider yourself a member of one of the churches?</b>		
Yes	45	43
No	54	54
Missing data	1	4
<b>How often do you attend church?</b>		
At least once a week	7	6
More than once a month	7	5
Several times a year	11	15
On family occasions and holidays	40	38
Never	33	33
Missing data	1	3

**Table 10.** The relationship between religious self-identity and *religious anti-Judaism* in 2011 and 2017 (percentage).

	Non-Antisemites		Moderate Antisemites		Extreme Antisemites	
	2011	2017	2011	2017	2011	2017
Full sample	65	57	23	25	12	18
<b>I am religious</b>						
Rather yes	49	44	31	30	20	26
Rather no	78	68	16	20	6	12

As Table 11 shows, in 2011, those who considered themselves as strictly religious were significantly more religiously antisemitic than the whole sample. In 2017, however, this group proved to be only slightly more antisemitic than the whole sample. Nevertheless, in this year, extreme antisemites are overrepresented among those following their own way in religion. In both years, those who said that they were not religious were the least antisemitic.

As mentioned above, church membership and church attendance only had a significant relationship with religious anti-Judaism in 2011. Those who were members of one of the churches were more antisemitic, either moderately or extremely. Moreover, the more frequently respondents attended religious services, the more prone they were to religious anti-Judaism (Table 12).

**Table 11.** The relationship between the strength of religious convictions and *religious anti-Judaism* in 2011 and 2017 (percentage).

	Non-Antisemites		Moderate Antisemites		Extreme Antisemites	
	2011	2017	2011	2017	2011	2017
Full sample	65	57	23	25	12	18
<b>Strength of religious convictions</b>						
Strictly religious	46	49	33	29	21	22
Religious in my own way	63	52	25	24	12	24
Don't know whether I am religious	62	60	24	31	14	9
Not religious	74	66	17	23	9	11

**Table 12.** The relationship of church membership and church attendance with *religious anti-Judaism* in 2011 (percentage).

	Non-Antisemites		Moderate Antisemites		Extreme Antisemites	
	2011					
Full sample	65		23		12	
<b>Do you consider yourself a member of one of the churches?</b>						
Yes	58		26		16	
No	71		20		9	
<b>How often do you attend church?</b>						
At least once a week	46		29		25	
More than once a month	43		38		19	
Several times a year	53		30		17	
On family occasions and holidays	67		21		12	
Never	75		19		6	

Table 13 shows the relationship of religiosity indicators with secular antisemitism. In 2011, all indicators of religiosity except the strength of religious convictions had a significant relationship with secular antisemitism. In the case of religious self-identity and church membership, the relationship was similar to that with religious anti-Judaism. Those who identified themselves as religious and considered themselves as a member of one of the churches were more antisemitic. In the case of church attendance, the relationship was also similar. However, the pattern is somewhat more clear-cut. Extreme antisemites were overrepresented among those attending religious service at least once a week, while moderate antisemites were among those who did that more than once a month or several times a year. In 2017, in the case of secular antisemitism, similarly to what we observed in the case of religious anti-Judaism, only religious self-identification and the strength of religious convictions remain significant. The relationship with the former was the same: those having religious self-identification were more antisemitic. In the case of the other independent variable, a new type of relationship occurred. Although those strictly religious and those religious in their own way were the most antisemitic, as in the case of religious anti-Judaism, the former group was more moderately antisemitic than the latter. Moreover, moderate antisemites were also overrepresented among the group undecided about their religiosity.

**Table 13.** The relationship of religious self-identity, church membership, and church attendance with secular antisemitism in 2011 and 2017 (percentage)<sup>6</sup>.

	Non-Antisemites		Moderate Antisemites		Extreme Antisemites	
	2011	2017	2011	2017	2011	2017
Full sample	39	36	38	37	23	27
<b>I am religious</b>						
Rather yes	29	26	44	35	27	39
Rather no	46	44	34	38	20	18
<b>Do you consider yourself a member of one of the churches?</b>						
Yes	33	—	40	—	27	—
No	43	—	37	—	20	—
<b>How often do you attend church?</b>						
At least once a week	27	—	40	—	33	—
More than once a month	33	—	54	—	13	—
Several times a year	28	—	51	—	21	—
On family occasions and holidays	43	—	32	—	25	—
Never	41	—	38	—	21	—
<b>Strength of religious convictions</b>						
Strictly religious	—	25	—	53	—	22
Religious in my own way	—	35	—	30	—	35
Don't know whether I am religious	—	29	—	48	—	23
Not religious	—	44	—	38	—	18

Table 14 shows the relationship of religiosity indicators with emotional antisemitism. In 2011, all indicators of religiosity but church attendance had a significant relationship with emotional antisemitism; in 2017, again, only religious self-identity and the strength of religious convictions. The relationship with the former was the usual one in both years: those who identified themselves as religious were more antisemitic than those who did not. In the case of the strength of religious convictions, in 2011, strictly religious respondents were the most emotionally antisemitic. However, non-antisemites were somewhat overrepresented among those following their own way in religion. In 2017, we observed the same pattern as in the case of secular antisemitism: moderate antisemites are overrepresented among strictly religious respondents, while extreme antisemites among those following their own way. As mentioned above, church membership only had a significant relationship with emotional antisemitism in 2011. The pattern is the usual one: those having church membership were more antisemitic.

<sup>6</sup> Missing data indicate insignificant relationships.

**Table 14.** The relationship of religious self-identity and the strength of religious convictions, and church membership with *emotional antisemitism* in 2011 and 2017 (percentage)<sup>7</sup>.

	Non-Antisemites		Moderate Antisemites		Extreme Antisemites	
	2011	2017	2011	2017	2011	2017
Full sample	63	68	15	8	22	24
<b>I am religious</b>						
Rather yes	55	61	16	7	29	32
Rather no	71	74	13	9	16	17
<b>Strength of religious convictions</b>						
Strictly religious	51	73	18	14	31	13
Religious in my own way	67	66	11	6	22	28
Don't know whether I am religious	61	67	19	11	20	22
Not religious	62	71	18	9	20	20
<b>Do you consider yourself a member of one of the churches?</b>						
Yes	61	—	12	—	27	—
No	65	—	17	—	18	—

## 5. Discussion

In our analysis, we dealt with three types of antisemitism: religious, secular, and emotional. The first two represented the cognitive component of antisemitism and were composed of variables measuring the agreement with different stereotypical statements. On the other hand, emotional antisemitism grasps the affective component. The result showed only a slight increase in religious and secular antisemitism between 2011 and 2017. While the proportion of moderate antisemites remained the same, that of extreme antisemites increased slightly. In the case of emotional antisemitism, while the proportion of moderate antisemites was a little lower in 2017, that of extreme antisemites remained almost the same. Moreover, it is important to note that the proportion of unclassifiable respondents was much higher in the case of religious, and especially secular antisemitism than in the case of the emotional one. The results show that measuring only the cognitive components of antisemitism is insufficient and should always be complemented with the measurement of its emotional intensity. The analysis of correlation showed, however, that secular antisemitism was more connected to the emotional intensity of antisemitism than religious anti-Judaism. This was especially the case in 2017.

As the next step of our analysis, we scrutinized the relationship between various indicators of religiosity and the different types of antisemitism. We found that in 2011 all indicators, namely religious self-identity, the strength of religious convictions, church membership, and church attendance were connected to religious anti-Judaism and most of them also to secular and emotional antisemitism. However, in 2017, only the indicators based on subjective self-classifications (religious self-identity, the strength of religious convictions) remained in a significant relationship with the different forms of antisemitism. The inclination for accepting antisemitic statements grew above all among those who characterized themselves as being religious in their own way. It is also interesting to note that while in 2011, the above set of variables had a stronger effect on religious anti-Judaism, than on the other types of antisemitism, in 2017, the strengths of effects equalized. Thus, it seems that in 2017, self-defined religiosity is the only indicator which significantly correlated with all forms of antisemitism.

Departing from these results, it is not groundless to presume that the relation of religion and antisemitism has undergone some substantial changes in Hungary. While in Poland, the support of statements expressing religiously based anti-Judaism grew significantly between 2009 and 2017,

<sup>7</sup> Missing data indicate insignificant relationships.

similar Hungarian data remained basically constant (see Table 5). The changes occurred in another dimension. It seems that while earlier personal religiosity and the level of religious practice played a significant role in influencing the strength of religious and secular antisemitism, nowadays, religion as a constituent of national and cultural identity and as political-cultural identity marker took over its function as a predictor of antisemitism.

The role of religion in the construction of collective identities has been widely analyzed in the literature on nationalism and religion. Rogers Brubaker characterized “religious nationalism as a specific phenomenon, one in which religion provides content for nationalism as a form” (Brubaker 2012, p. 17). According to Roger Friedland, “Religious nationalism . . . makes religion the basis for the nation’s collective identity and the source of its ultimate values and purpose on this earth.” (Friedland 2001, p. 139). In another article dealing with contemporary anti-Moslem rhetoric of the European far-right, Rogers Brubaker pointed at the phenomenon he called the ‘culturalization of religion’ and the appearance of ‘identitarian Christianity’ whose purpose is not the defense of religious values and religiosity as such but setting boundaries between the Christian “Us” and the Moslem “Them” (Brubaker 2017, p. 1191). In the last decade, since a national-conservative administration governs the country, in Hungary, religion as a cultural marker has been playing a much stronger role in the public discourse on national identity than before. The discourse of the national-conservative right resuscitated the “Christian-national” idea of the pre-WWII decades in a new context. According to this view, Christian culture is the unifying force of the nation, and it gives the inner essence and meaning of the state, and at the same time, the guarantee for the survival of Europe as a collective of Christian nations. “Without Christian culture, there will be no free life in Europe; and that if we fail to defend our Christian culture, we will lose Europe, and Europe will no longer belong to Europeans”, declared Prime Minister Orbán in a speech last year.<sup>8</sup> In this discourse, the nation itself appears as a sacred collective entity, and national identification carries religious attributes: being Christian is equated with being Hungarian, belonging to the national community. An extremely powerful expression of this position is the preamble of the new Hungarian constitution called “Fundamental Law” (2011), according to which the constitution is anchored to the Christian roots of Hungary, and the commitment to nation-sustaining power of Christianity. In this context, self-declared and self-defined Christian religiosity can be considered as a symbolic marker for accepting the national-conservative identity discourse and belonging to the “Christian-national” cultural-political camp which represents the national community defined on this basis. Previous research has pointed at the identity creating function of antisemitism for the far-right political scene in Hungary (Kovács 2012). The Christian-national discourse seems to play a similar role. It is not groundless to presume that a substantial group of those for whom religiosity is a marker for political belonging tend to accept other elements of the identity discourses of the same camp, too. However, further research is needed to investigate how far the impact of culturalized and politicized religion on anti-Jewish prejudice can be considered as an independent explanatory factor of the relationship between religiosity and antisemitism.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/without-christian-culture-there-will-be-no-free-life-in-europe-if-we-fail-to-defend-our-christian-culture-we-will-lose-europe-and-europe-will-no-longer-belong-to-europeans> (accessed on 8 August 2019).



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Article

# Rethinking the Role of Religion in Arab Antisemitic Discourses

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**Abstract:** “The Palestinian cause is not about land and soil, but it is about faith and belief,” insist Islamists in their attempts to Islamize the Arab–Israeli conflict. This paper examines the instrumentalization of religion in the conflict since its early stages, and its impact on Arab antisemitic discourses. It is based on an ongoing research project exploring references to the Jews in Arab, particularly the Palestinian and Egyptian, Islamist as well as nationalist media, during major landmarks in the conflict’s history, from the Arab Wailing Wall riots in 1929 up to US president Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017. It contends that despite the intensified exploitation of Islam in the incitement against Israel, Zionism, and the Jews, and despite the traditional enmity towards the Jews as a group deriving from Islam, preliminary findings show that the most common themes in the Arab antisemitic discourse originate from a more modern, exogenous vocabulary and perceptions. Classical Christian–Western tropes, such as conspiracy theories epitomized in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Nazi terminology, and Holocaust denial, are extensively used and are much more pervasive.

**Keywords:** Antisemitism; Islam; Arab–Israeli conflict; anti-Zionism; Judeophobia; anti-Judaism

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The Temple Mount and Jerusalem, which are considered by the Palestinians and most of the Muslims in the world as Muslim holy sites, were the cause for the explosion of disturbances and clashes between Israeli security forces and the Palestinians in 2017. On 14 July, three Israeli Arabs from Umm al-Fahm assassinated two Israeli police border guards at the exit from the Temple Mount. In response, the Israeli authorities closed the compound for worshippers to enable the investigation of the incident, and decided to place metal detectors at the entrance of the premise. These measures sparked protests and incitement in the Arab and Muslim worlds against what was interpreted as an Israeli attempt to change the status quo in the Temple Mount and as a further step in Israel’s efforts to cleanse Palestine of its Palestinians inhabitants, take control of the Mount according to a “grand plan” to destroy al-Aqsa mosque and build the Third Temple.

Shaykh Kamal Khatib, the deputy head of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel accused the Israeli government in a televised interview with al-Jazira TV on 16 July of injecting chemical substances with a long-term effect in al-Aqsa mosque to bring about its destruction. Egyptian al-Azhar Professor, Ahmad Karima, called upon the Muslim world to wage an armed *jihad* (holy war) against the Jews, whom she described as aggressors, thieves, and slayers of prophets during an interview with the Palestinian Authority’s official TV channel on 20 July. Imams in Friday sermons, such as Egyptian-born ‘Amr Shahin at the Islamic Center of Davis in California, called on 14 and 21 July to “liberate al-Aqsa mosque from the filth of the Jews”, and “turn Jerusalem into a graveyard for the Jews”. On 21 July, Shaykh Mahmud Harmush of the California-based Islamic Center of Riverside also called for the annihilation of the Jews, and accused them of plotting not only to capture and destroy al-Aqsa, but also to capture Mecca and Medina. Following negotiations with King Abdallah of

Jordan, who serves as the guardian of the holy sites in Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>, and with al-Aqsa leaders, the metal detectors were removed, and the previous entrance regulations were reinstated. After three weeks of clashes around the Mount and across the West Bank, especially on Fridays, defined as “days of rage”, the protests and demonstrations subsided.

Commenting on these events, Lebanese columnist Jihad al-Khazin in the London-based *al-Hayat* on 22 and 28 July denied any Jewish connection to Jerusalem referring to Israel’s alleged futile efforts to find archeological proofs to support its “lies” throughout its 70 years of history. Similar contentions were voiced by ‘Ali Muhsin Hamid on 26 July, in an article in the Egyptian daily *al-Ahram* titled “Jerusalem was never and will never be Jewish”. If the Israeli claims of Jewish connection were to be true, he claimed, the true Jewish inhabitants needed to be from Palestinian origin and not Russians, Indians, Americans, Ethiopians, and so on.

Another event which triggered similar reactions a few months later was President Donald Trump’s declaration on 6 December 2017, recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which also foresaw the remaining of the Wailing Wall in Israeli hands in any future agreement with the Palestinians. Turkey’s president Recep Tayyip *Erdogan*, who aspires to represent the whole Muslim world, convened in mid-December an extraordinary summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul, in which the participants reiterated the significance of Jerusalem in Islam and their support for the Palestinian struggle, and decided to cooperate and take action against Trump’s decision. On 12 December, Shaykh al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib, the highest religious authority in the Sunni world, convened the council of al-Azhar scholars, which according to the London-based *al-Quds al-‘Arabi* from 13 December, rejected Trump’s declaration and defined it as “an injustice with no historical or legal foundations”. The public protests encompassed most Arab and Muslim capitals, and calls encouraging a third intifada and *jihad* against Israel were voiced by Muslim preachers in Arab countries and in mosques of Muslim communities worldwide.

Again, it was Jewish history and the so-called Israel’s and Zionism’s “invented myths” that preoccupied Arab writers and commentators, denying any Jewish ties to Palestine in general and to Jerusalem in particular. A few of them relied on the controversies among Israeli and non-Israeli historians and archeologists on the interpretation of their findings. “There is no such thing as Israel or Tel Aviv,” announced Muhammad al-Mula in an interview with the Kuwaiti TV on 12 December, adding that “Jerusalem is Arab and Islamic. Jerusalem is the city of Islam . . . It will return to the Arab and Islamic nation”. Trump adopted “the Zionist narrative”, claimed ‘Umar Hilmi al-Ghul in the Palestinian *al-Hayat al-Jadida* on 9 December. “It is not our goal to examine the falsification of history and Trump’s ignorance,” he wrote. If he wants to learn the truth he should read what Israeli archeologists wrote after “searching for the past 70 years for one archeological remnant related to the [presence] of a third temple [there were only two], or connecting the Jews to Palestine in general”. Similarly, Hamas leader Muhammad Nazzal accused the Zionists of falsifying biblical remnants in Lebanese *al-Akhabar* on 13 December, claiming as well that Israeli archeological scholars, such as Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin, “failed to provide important proof that the city [Jerusalem] was inhabited [by Jews] in the 10th Century BC”.

In this debate there was a tacit agreement between all Palestinian factions Hamas, the Muslim Brothers in Jordan and Palestinian Authority’s (PA) representatives on the perception of Trump’s declaration as a new and worse Balfour Declaration. Hamas leader Isma‘il Haniyya described Trump’s statement at a rally marking 30 years to the founding of Hamas on 14 December, as even more dangerous than the Balfour Declaration. Fatah leaders and the PA considered it as a “second Balfour Declaration”, whereas journalist ‘Abdelilah Belqaziz in United Arab Emirates (UAE) daily *al-Khalij* of 18 December described it as “the first bitter fruit” of the so-called “Arab Spring” and a severe crime,

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan was recognized by Israel as the guardian of the holy places in Jerusalem since 1967, after its defeat in the War and retreat from the West Bank.

exceeding “Balfour’s crime which is exactly one century old”. Trump was even compared to Adolf Hitler. Ahmad Qadidi, a Tunisian politician and former ambassador to Qatar published an article in the Qatari daily *al-Sharq* on 14 December, describing the American move as “a final solution to the Palestinian problem”, likening it to Hitler’s final solution for the Jewish problem—a move in which he “did not succeed”. On the same day, the Palestinian Fatah movement posted in its hashtag “Hands Off Alquds” Trump’s picture on top of Hitler’s picture, with an English title: “I can’t see the difference. Can you?”<sup>2</sup>

*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were also invoked in an article by Yasir ‘Abdullah on 19 December, in the Palestinian Ma’an News Agency. After describing them and their goals, he claimed that Jerusalem is in danger, and that the US is “a tool for the execution of the Zionist plots throughout the Arab world”. Therefore, he suggested counteracting them by drafting the “Protocols of the Elders of Palestine/Arabs” for dealing with Arab weaknesses and inter-Palestinian rifts, and enabling them in the next 100 years “to retrieve the lands and restore Arab pride”.

In contrast to these commentaries, a few writers, such as former PA minister Ziyad Abu Ziyad, and the Saudi prince Turki al-Faysal, called to leverage the declaration for the recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state.<sup>3</sup> The head of the Middle East Research Institute in Jeddah, ‘Abd al-Hamid Hakim, in a televised interview with the al-Hurra TV on 15 December, also expressed his support for Trump’s declaration and recognized Jewish history and links to the city. “We must recognize and understand that Jerusalem is a religious symbol for the Jews. It is sacred [to them] as are Mecca and al-Madina to the Muslims.” Hamid added that “the Arab mind must clear itself from the legacies of Nasserism and political Islam, both Sunni and Shi’i, which instilled a culture of hatred [towards] the Jews and denied their historical right to the region.”<sup>4</sup>

Those two relatively recent episodes are typical examples of the complex entanglement of religion in the Arab–Israeli conflict and its reflection in the Arab antisemitic discourse. They contain major elements: the centrality of symbols such as the Temple Mount and Jerusalem; the pattern and vocabulary of mobilization; the denial of Jewish history in Palestine; the negative perceptions of the Jews; the invocation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; the usage of the Nazi era terminology; and a few dissenting voices, challenging the Islamist and mainstream discourse on Israel and the Jews. This paper seeks to review the role of religion in the conflict over Palestine between the Palestinian Arabs and the Zionist/Jewish settlers, and to examine the way it impacted the Arab antisemitic discourse. It is a part of an ongoing project exploring references to the Jews in Arab, and particularly Palestinian and Egyptian, Islamist as well as nationalist press, during major landmarks in the conflict’s history, from the Arab Wailing Wall riots in 1929 up to US president Trump recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.<sup>5</sup> This is a qualitative research which seeks to establish how and when Islam was used to Islamize the conflict and antisemitism, and to assess to what extent these attempts succeeded.

A basic premise of this article is that antisemitism in the Arab and Muslim world is a religious, cultural, social and political construction of the contemporary era in the wake of the conflict and the rise of Arab nationalism and Islamism. Another premise is that it comprises religious anti-Judaic and Judeophobic themes as well as imported Christian European antisemitic themes. Hence, it is both a continuation of the past and a modern phenomenon, which creates a new authentic brand of antisemitism that can be termed as Islamic new antisemitism. There is a great confusion in the

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<sup>2</sup> Memri, “Violent Incitement Against Trump On Fatah Social Media Accounts,” special dispatch No. 7239, 19 December 2017, accessed 9 March 2019, at <https://www.memri.org/reports/violent-incitement-against-trump-fatah-social-media-accounts-comparisons-hitler-execution>.

<sup>3</sup> Memri, “Saudi Prince Turki Al-Faisal in Open Letter to Trump,” special dispatch No. 7225, 13 December 2017, accessed 9 March 2019, at <https://www.memri.org/reports/turki-faisal-open-letter-to-trump>.

<sup>4</sup> MemriTV, clip No. 6324, 15 December 2017, accessed 9 March 2019, at <https://www.memri.org/tv/saudi-researcher-jerusalem-is-capital-of-israel-opportunity-for-peace>.

<sup>5</sup> The landmarks are: 1929 riots; the period between the two world wars and the 1936–1939 Arab revolt; 1948 in the wake of the establishment of the state of Israel; the Tripartite War of 1956; the 1967 War; the first intifada; the second intifada; and the Arab Spring.

terms used to define antisemitism in the Arab and Muslim worlds—anti-Jewishness; Jew-hatred; anti-Judaism; Judeophobia; Islamic antisemitism; Islamic anti-Zionism. For facilitating the discussion, this paper continues to use the term antisemitism, but it suggests to relate the term antisemitism to the imported Western themes, and to refer to the religious-based dehumanization of Jews, especially in the Islamist discourse, as Judeophobia. Whereas Judeophobia encompasses in the Arab/Muslim world: denigration of Judaism, defamation of the Jewish character, discrimination against Jews, and efforts at their destruction, antisemitism encompasses the Western perceptions of the Jews as an omnipotent subversive power, seeking to control the world, absent in Islamic culture which perceive the Jews as meek and coward. (For a discussion on this issue see: [Schroeter 2018](#); [Judaken 2018](#)). Such a differentiation refines the understanding of the phenomenon, and avoids the pitfall of essentialism in the search for the roots of antisemitism in the Arab world, common in certain works that claim that it is “an inherent part of the Islamic culture” ([Israeli 2005](#); [Bostom 2008](#)). This approach also corresponds with the “schema of paradigms” introduced by Douglas Pratt “to reflect the historical variants and developments of the relationship between Islam and Judaism:” the originating paradigms of the early Islamic era; the historic-legal paradigms or the *dhimmi* regulations of the Medieval period; the contemporary-negative paradigms or the Islamic neo-antisemitism of the modern era; and the prospective-positive paradigms, based on acceptance and affirmation, which can be traced in recent years ([Pratt 2010](#)).

Clifford Geertz defines religion as: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, persuasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the motivations seem uniquely realistic” ([Geertz 1973](#), p. 90; [Marvin and Inge 1999](#), p. 18). Religion provides the motivation, the justification, the organization, and the worldview. This was clearly apparent in the religiously based mobilization of the Palestinians and Muslims for the Palestinian cause as well as for the later mobilization of global Jihadists ([Dawson 2018](#)). “The force of a religion in supporting social values rests on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as the forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients” ([Geertz 1973](#), p. 131). Kocku von Stuckrad adds that “Religions are powerful not because they reveal transcendent truths or the effects of an ontologized ‘History’, but because they serve as instruments in the communicative formation of identity and provide people with a concrete script of action” ([Von Stuckrad 2003](#), pp. 268–69). Therefore, he suggests examining the role of religions as systems of communication and action. Jonathan Fox posited four roles that religion can play in a conflict between groups. First, religion provides an ideological framework for understanding the world; secondly, religion defines codes of behavior that link the faithful and their activities to that framework; thirdly, religion links the individual to an all-encompassing story and at times creates the institutions that organize and recruit individuals towards the realization of these goals; finally, religion provides legitimacy for activities and institutions in pursuit of these goals ([Fox 1999](#)).

The gist of these approaches to religion informs my analysis. It comprises of three parts: the first part is a background note on Islam’s attitude towards the Jews and the rise of antisemitism; the second part focuses on the deliberate actions employed in the exploitation of religion during the 1920s, and the two intifadas by political and religious leaders; and the third part deals with the major religious themes raised in the contemporary polemics against the Jews.

A major contention of this paper is that Islam played a crucial role in the conflict since its very early stages, and it was naturally so. Most writers on the conflict acknowledged the role of religion but they considered it secondary to the role of the secular, nationalist discourse until the 1967 War, claiming that the conflict underwent an Islamization process with the surge of political Islam in the aftermath of this war ([Litvak 1998](#); [Sivan 2008](#)). I will show that from the very beginning of the conflict Islam was used to fan the conflict and mobilize domestic, Arab, and Muslim support for the Palestinian cause. “In contexts of confessional and national-ethnic conflict”, Islam often served “to articulate the nationalism of groups that are living within a political structure,” contended Coury

(Coury 2004, p. 130). Moreover, as Jonathan Gribetz showed in his study on Muslim-Jewish relations in the late years of the Ottoman Empire, “the intellectuals of this period often thought of one another and interpreted one another’s actions in terms of two central categories: religion and race” (Gribetz 2014, p. 3). Religion was central to the empire’s relationship with its diverse populations, and continued to be central during the Mandate period. As Palestinian scholar, Musa Budeiri, further elaborated, “the overt articulation of goals and policies was expressed in terms of Islam. Indeed, it could not be otherwise. No other ideological idiom would have been familiar or comprehensible to the rural inhabitants of the country, who constituted a majority and to whom the idea of nation and national interest was totally alien” (Budeiri 1997, p. 196). Moreover, Islam is perceived as faith (*din*) and state (*dawla*), and even the modern concept of nationalism which emerged in the Arab world since the last quarter of the 19th century was infused with religion. The rise of Islamist movements exacerbated the attempts to Islamize the conflict and reinforced themes which have already existed.

Another contention is that the entanglement of religion in the conflict had a decisive impact on the rise of antisemitism in Arab and Muslim societies, and on its features. However, since the Islamization of the conflict was seen as derived from the surge of Islamist movements, it had also been assumed that the state-sponsored antisemitism of the 1950s and 1960s was inculcated from above (Harkabi 1974, pp. 263–70), whereas Islamist antisemitism emerged from below, and as such it appears to be more deeply rooted. It seems, however, that Islamist antisemitism was also inculcated from above with the efforts of the Palestinian leadership to construct the conflict as a religious conflict from the 1920s. Both nationalist and Islamist discourse on the Jews drew anti-Jewish themes from Islamic sources, albeit from different standpoints and different degrees, to describe the Jewish threat. Islamist ideology combined the historical religious aspects of its perception of the conflict with national and social aspects (El-Awaisi 1991, pp. 226, 234–44), and combined in its Judeophobic discourse imported Western themes.

Preliminary findings of this research clearly show that despite the intensified exploitation of Islam in the incitement against Israel, Zionism, and the Jews, the most popular recurring antisemitic themes were derived from classical Christian and Western vocabulary, especially conspiracy theories, the blood libel, Nazi imagery, and Holocaust denial. During the period between the two world wars, the Arab press was extensively preoccupied with the issue of the Jews, especially in view of the rising antisemitism in Europe and the immigration to Palestine, and exhibited a wide and diversified range of attitudes. Most reports were informative, and did not obsessively deal with the inherent corrupted character of the Jews. Although already then Islamic sources were used to provide justification for the delegitimization of Zionism, and were welded with Western antisemitic tropes, the Islamist discourse acknowledged Jewish history and the Jewish link to the land of Israel–Palestine. An abrupt change in attitude occurred with the establishment of the state of Israel, bringing to the fore a more monolithic discourse, which strives to deny Jewish historical roots in Palestine and challenge the nationhood of the Jews. This trend was exacerbated by the rise of political Islam.

Another finding is that there is continuity in the patterns of Islamic mobilization, which started with the first Arab riots of the 1920s—the terms, the symbols, and days of action. However, it seems that in the wake of the Arab revolutions of 2011, and the aversion in Arab societies to the Islamist ideology and practice, as well as a result of regional and global strategic changes there is a growing, albeit slow, trend, of revisiting the attitudes towards Israel and the Jews. A perusal through the content of Hamas mouthpiece *Filastin al-Muslīma* in 2011–12, even shows that the religious themes, such as the early Muslim encounter with the Jews, which were extensively discussed in the 1990s, diminished significantly over the years. Moreover, despite the surge of religiosity at various levels of Arab societies, there is a gap between rhetoric and praxis. While the volume, virulence, and aggressiveness of the rhetoric against Jews continues unabated, especially in time of crises and confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians, the religiously based mobilization attempts failed to achieve their goals, and the Palestinians found themselves again and again alone in their war with Israel.



## 1. Islam's Attitude Towards the Jews and the Rise of Antisemitism

Two major points of the history of Muslim-Jewish relations from the early days of Islam to the contemporary era are relevant to the discussion in this paper: the Islamic scriptures portrayal of the Jews or the originating paradigms of the early Islamic era; and the Jews' legal status under Muslim rule or the *dhimmi regulations* of the medieval period. "The Qur'an has both positive and negative things to say about Jews. However, the positive statements come from the early part of Muhammad's career, while he was still in Pagan Mecca (610–22), and are mainly in the context of biblical history and lore" (Stillman 2010, p. 212). The Prophet's attitude underwent a radical change after his emigration to Medina, and the anti-Jewish verses were the result of his encounter with the Jews there and their rejection of his message. These verses attack not only the tenets of the Jewish faith but also the alleged characteristics of the Jewish community: Treachery, clannishness and divisiveness (Ben-Shammai 1988; Sivan 2012, p. 3). This early Islamic history preoccupied Muslim polemicists and shaped attitudes and behavior towards Christians and Jews in Arab lands. "In particular, Muslim polemicists have focused on the Jewish tribes of Medina, those who took up arms against the Prophet and sought to betray him to his enemies as the latter besieged the city" (Lassner and Troen 2007, p. 5). However, Islamic theology was for many centuries less preoccupied with the Jews because of their weakness and misery. As scholar Jeffrey Kenney notes, "the successful military and ideological expansion of Islam overshadowed the earlier challenges that Jews had posed to Muhammad" (Kenney 1994, p. 253).

Recognized as *ahl al-kitab* (the People of the Book), believers in monotheism, Jews and Christians were considered to be *ahl al-dhimma*—protected religious communities by the Islamic state under Islamic law. "Both the covenant of *dhimma* and the *millet* system [established in the Ottoman Empire] rested on institutionalized discrimination on the basis of religion" (Stillman 2019). They were allowed to exercise their religions and their communal life, but had to abide by the rules and duties dictated by "a social framework of discriminations and disabilities that constantly emphasized the superiority of Muslims", as Wistrich emphasized (Wistrich 2002, p. 6; see also *ibid.*). It should be noted, however, that until the modern era, Jews lacked demonic qualities attributed to them in medieval Christian literature, and the negative representation of the Jews in Islamic sources did not reflect obsessive emotional hatred (Stillman 2010, p. 214. See also Lewis 1997, pp. 117–39).

Historians of medieval Islam, such as Mark Cohen and the late Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, claim that "despite the theological intolerance that Islam shared with Christendom, the Jews of Islam experienced far greater security and integration with the majority society than their brethren in Europe" (Cohen 1986, p. 127). The Jews were indigenous inhabitants of the area, not as in Western Christendom, and they shared their *dhimmi* status with other non-Muslim groups. Moreover, pluralism and religious heterogeneity were engrained more deeply in Islamic than in European society, and Muslim religious discrimination was directed at the *dhimmi* class as a whole, rather than at the Jews in particular. Therefore, "the negative psychological impact of second-class status was substantially blunted for the Jews" (*Ibid.*, p. 133). Moreover, there was a gap between theory and practice, which "made for a basically lenient, flexible attitude in many spheres, and for turning a blind eye to many practices which diverged from the desirable theory of holy law" (Lazarus-Yafeh 1999, p. 108. See also Nirenberg 2013, p. 177–78). Even in the later Middle Ages, when relations between Muslims and *dhimmi*s deteriorated, "nobody ever connected Jews with Satan . . . or attributed to them any devilish intention" (Lazarus-Yafeh 1999, 111). Jew-hatred, as the renowned scholar Goitein concluded from the Geniza documents, was on the whole "local and sporadic, rather than general and endemic" (Goitein 1971, p. 283, as quoted by Stillman 2010, p. 215).

European antisemitism, in both its theological and racist versions, was essentially alien to Islamic traditions, culture, and modes of thought, asserted Bernard Lewis (Lewis 1998, p. 43). However, in the modern era "to an astonishing degree, the ideas, the literature, even the crudest inventions of the Nazis and their predecessors have been internalized and Islamized. The major themes—poisoning wells, the invented Talmud quotations, ritual murder, the hatred of mankind, the Masonic and



other conspiracy theories, taking over the world—remain; but with an Islamic twist” (Ibid. See also (Webman 2018)).

Manifestations of ideological hostility to Jews were the products of modernity appearing already in the 19th century, before the emergence of Zionism, as a result of the growing European political and cultural penetration of the Middle East. Coupled with the weakness of the Muslim world they created a sense of deep crisis among Muslims, causing a worsening in their attitude towards the Christian and Jewish minorities, identified as the main beneficiaries of the growing Western influence and of various reform efforts carried out by local rulers. The import of anti-Jewish ideas and antisemitic themes along with other ideas, mostly by missionaries and Christian Arab graduates of European schools, exacerbated the intolerance towards the Jews. The emergence of Arab nationalism and Zionism, Jewish immigration to Palestine, and the deep trauma of the 1948 Arab defeat by the nascent Jewish state exacerbated the anti-Jewish hostility and created a fertile ground for the entrenchment of imported antisemitic perceptions and for the reappearance of anti-Jewish Islamic traditions to rationalize the negation of Zionism, Israel, and the Jews. (For the rise of antisemitism in the Arab world, see Haim 1955; Harkabi 1974; Sivan 1989; Nettler 1989; Lewis 1997; Wistrich 2002; Krämer 2006; Webman 2017).

## 2. Patterns of Mobilization

“From 1918 onwards, the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement drew on Islamic arguments and sentiment in mobilizing popular support around specific threats, in the struggle against the Jewish National Home and the British Mandate. The Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Supreme Muslim Council consistently highlighted the Islamic importance of Jerusalem, and the threat posed by Zionism to the Muslim holy sites there, particularly after the Wailing Wall disturbances of 1929” (Taji-Farouki 2004, pp. 321–22). Several methods of action were used:

- Organizing demonstrations, processions, and riots, especially on the occasion of religious festivities and in locations with religious significance, such as Jerusalem and Hebron;
- Issuing *fatwas* (religious edicts) banning the sale of lands to Jews; forbidding concession of any part of Palestine; and justifying suicide attacks against Israeli targets;
- Calling for *jihad* and glorifying martyrdom;
- Convening conferences for the mobilization of the Muslim World;
- Constructing the myth of Palestine as a sacred Muslim land, and highlighting the importance of Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque in Islam;
- Spreading rumors and incitement by political and religious leaders.

The Wailing Wall crisis of 1929, considered by Israeli historian Hillel Cohen as the “year zero of the Jewish-Arab conflict” (Cohen 2013. See also Samuel 1929), is indeed the first most important case of the use of Islam by the Palestinian leadership at the time, as the result of a campaign to make the world, and Palestinians, aware of a threat to the Muslim Holy Places. Many of the mobilization tools, enumerated above, were used during these events. The Wailing Wall is the most sacred site in Judaism, but is also the Western boundary of the *Haram al-Sharif*, the Muslim sacred precinct which includes the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. It is also where the Prophet tied the *Buraq*, the riding animal upon which he rode during the Night of Ascension to Heaven (*Mi'raj*). The incidents started on a religious day—the Day of Atonement, 24 September 1928, when Jewish worshippers at the Wall set up screens to partition men from women. The screens were considered an aberration of the status quo by the Arabs and following their complaints to the British authorities, the screens were removed. The Supreme Muslim Council exacerbated the tension by harassing Jewish worshippers and by an active campaign to raise Palestinian consciousness of the perceived danger posed by the Jews to the al-Aqsa Mosque. Since its establishment in 1922, the Supreme Muslim Council challenged the Jews’ right of access to the Wall with ritual paraphernalia (screens, benches, and so forth) arguing that “the Wall was part of a *waqf* endowment and therefore Muslim property” (Johnson 1982, p. 25).

The riots reached their peak in summer 1929 and spread to other locations, including Hebron and Jaffa (Porath 1977; Cohen 2013). The council turned sanctified places into political symbols, and infused politics in religious festivals in these events and in the 1936–39 Arab revolt (Kupferschmidt 1984).

In October 1928 the Committee for the Defense of Al-Buraq Al-Sharif, set up and inspired by Hajj Amin al-Husayni, issued a declaration addressed to all Muslims, stressing that it is incumbent on all Muslims to face the aggression against their Holy Places “and make their 400 million voices a single voice, raised in defense of Al-Buraq Al-Sharif, which is part of the blessed Mosque of Al-Aqsa” (Johnson 1982, p. 28; Kupferschmidt 1984, pp. 191–92). In a somewhat different interpretation, Ilan Pappé belittles the importance of Islam in this document, claiming that it was present “in the background and marginal”, and it was not the insult of religion that was defended but the social and political rights of the Muslim believers (Pappé 1998, p. 94). Nevertheless, these events had a strong pan-Islamic impact, and Husayni exploited them to raise international Muslim interest in Palestine. In 1931, he managed to convene in Jerusalem the Islamic Congress in defense of Jerusalem, attended by eminent scholars from all over the Muslim world, including the renowned Islamic scholar Muhammad Rashid Rida (Kramer 1986, pp. 123–41). Following in the footsteps of this congress, the OIC, an international organization of over 50 Muslim states, was formed in 1969 after an arson attack on al-Aqsa mosque by a Christian Australian on 21 August. Although representing heads of states and not religious scholars, the OIC dedicated a permanent committee to the Jerusalem issue, and defined its goals as safeguarding the interests and securing the progress and well-being of their peoples and of all Muslims in the world (Milton-Edwards 2008, p. 78).

In 1934, with the increase in Jewish immigration due to the persecution of German Jews and in land purchases, Husayni issued a *fatwa*, which forbade any sale of land to Zionists or their agents. He defined the sale of land to Jews as apostasy (*kufr*), and treachery towards God and his Messenger. He also portrayed the Jews as seeking “the extinction of the light of Islam and the Arabs from the holy land”, which had been granted to the Palestinians as a divine trust (*amana*)” (Taji-Farouki 2004, p. 322; Kupferschmidt 1984, p. 195). Another fatwa reinforcing Husayni’s ban on lands sales conveying the same urgency was issued in January 1935 at the first conference of Palestinian ‘ulama’ in Jerusalem (Kupferschmidt 1984, pp. 196–97; The Jordanian Awqaf Department 1990, pp. 65–69). Similar fatwas were repeatedly issued since then, prohibiting the sale of lands, calling for *jihād*, and forbidding peace or normalization with Israel.<sup>6</sup> Al-Azhar scholars issued a declaration in April 1948 on the duty to fight in Palestine and defined the war as *jihād* (Jankowski 1984, p. 320; Reiter 2011, pp. 79–80, 175–76), and a year after the 1967 War, al-Azhar Academy of Islamic Research held a conference whose rulings further consolidated the rejection of the Jewish state in religious terms (Green 1971). For a critical discussion of the impact of this conference, see Schroeter 2018). The rise of Islamist movements in the wake of the swift Israeli victory in the war and the blow dealt to the dominant pan-Arab political and ideological order gave another impetus to the exploitation of religion and the theologization of the conflict.

These patterns of mobilization, which had been traced already in the first violent confrontations between Arabs and Jews in the 1920s, continued to be employed by the Palestinians, in the first intifada in 1987–1992, the second intifada in 2000–2004, as well as in subsequent encroachments between the Palestinians and Israel. They were particularly evident in the activities of Hamas and Hizballah.

Both Hamas and Hizballah perceived the Arab–Israeli conflict as the epitome of an inherently irreconcilable struggle between Jews and Muslims, between Judaism and Islam. It is not a national or territorial conflict but a historical, religious, cultural, and existential conflict between truth and falsehood, maintained Hamas’ Charter. The only way to confront this struggle is through Islam and by means of *jihād*, until victory or martyrdom (Maqdsi 1993; Nüsse 1993; Kramer 1987; Norton 1987, p. 169). Both movements used what Bernard Wasserstein called “the calendar of communal riot” (Wasserstein 1996; Kupferschmidt 1984) for popular mobilization. This calendar included the occasions of:

<sup>6</sup> For a collection of fatwas from the mid-1930s to 1990, see (The Jordanian Awqaf Department 1990).

- Islamic holidays such as ‘Id al-Adha (the feast of sacrifices concluding the Hajj); the month of Ramadan; the ‘Ashura, commemorating Imam Husayn’s martyrdom, which became a symbol of shi‘i oppression and later shi‘i activism, for Hizballah;
- Historic events such as the Battle of Badr (symbolizing the victory of Muhammad’s Muslim minority over the infidel majority in 624);
- Landmarks in the Arab–Israeli conflict—the Balfour Declaration; the Six-Day War of 1967; the Land Day of 30 March;<sup>7</sup> the first day of the first intifada;<sup>8</sup>
- Memorial Days of the martyrs (*shuhada’*), killed during military operations;
- Jerusalem Day, a commemorative holiday fixed on the last Friday of Ramadan, by Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini in 1980, a year after he seized power in Iran.

All these occasions served for demonstrations, processions, riots, and commercial strikes (Webman 1994).

Throughout the Mandate period, concedes Budeiri, Islam served to shape an ideology of resistance. “The slogans and rallying cries of the anti-occupation movement have shown an increasing tendency since the 1980s to couch themselves in an Islamic mode,” he argues, adding that “the practice of holding demonstrations after Friday prayers when people are congregating at mosques, the use of mosques as social support networks, their use as relatively safe havens and to carry out teaching when schools are closed and later as centers for the distribution of food and money, all tended to reinforce the view that political commitment is an extension of religious belief.” However, he added, “religion was the medium not the message . . . It is not that the Palestinians betrayed an early fundamentalist bias or possessed a doctrinal bent, but their struggle against Jewish colonization was perceived in religious terms and this was their only recognizable *Weltanschauung*” (Budeiri 1997, p. 201).

Another tool of indoctrination and mobilization, especially after the 1967 War, was the educational system. The curriculum and the schoolbooks underpinned the perception of the conflict, Israel, and the Jews in religious terms (e.g., Mueller 2012; Groiss 2018). During the first intifada leaflets served as a medium to convey general instructions to the population. They also served as a platform for Hamas and the Fatah United National Committee to voice their respective ideologies and political positions (Mishal and Aharoni 1989). While the first intifada witnessed the canonization of civic resistance, the second intifada (al-Aqsa) witnessed the sanctification of suicide acts. “The suicide phenomenon emerged in the heat of a struggle for independence by a society in which Islamic symbols of heroism and sacrifice were inherent national elements,” explained Meir Hatina (Hatina 2008, p. 33). Palestinian suicide attacks became a religious ritual and their perpetrators were perceived as martyrs (*shuhada’*).<sup>9</sup>

The second intifada known also as Al-Aqsa intifada, which broke out at the end of September 2000, after the visit of the then Israeli opposition leader, Ariel Sharon, to the Temple Mount, brought about an unprecedented wave of incitement and antisemitic manifestations in the Arab world and worldwide, including among Muslim communities in the West. It highlighted the religious dimension of the Arab–Israeli conflict, and blurred the lines between the nationalist and Islamist discourses. It was no surprise that a symbol such as the sacred Islamic site of al-Aqsa in Jerusalem had the capacity to spark off such an aggressive Muslim reaction.

Beside the popular demonstrations and the violence, the intifada brought in its wake a wave of radicalized anti-Israeli and antisemitic rhetoric. Friday sermons at mosques throughout the Arab world were dominated by angry denunciations of Israeli brutality and calls for *jihad*, which was presented as a religious duty incumbent on all Muslims. Hamas leaders described Jews as “enemies of humanity”

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<sup>7</sup> A day marking the confrontations between Israeli authorities and striking Israeli Arabs over land expropriation in 1976.

<sup>8</sup> 9 December 1987, was the first day of the uprisings in Gaza.

<sup>9</sup> Recent studies on nationalism show that as a system for organizing groups, nationalism is a religion of blood sacrifice, since they revere martyrdom for the state and its symbols. See for example, (Marvin and Inge 1999).

and “monsters in the shape of human beings”, and reiterated that “Israel is a foreign body, imposed by force and will be eliminated by force” (Webman 2003).

However, these calls to action remained unheeded. The Islamists who generally succeeded in inculcating their perception of the struggle against Israel and the Jews among more moderate and secularist Arab circles, failed in mobilizing them into an all-out war of *jihād*. A Lebanese journalist wondered to what extent these clerical calls, issued in the form of statements or sermons were made out of conviction, and to what extent they were merely designed to assuage public anger. Indeed, the public anger was mainly vented in demonstrations and a barrage of articles, caricatures, and TV programs invoking the blood libel, Nazi-era terminology and symbols, Holocaust denial, and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. References to the Islamic scriptures were more confined to Islamist media outlets and websites, with the depiction of al-Aqsa strangled by the Israeli occupation as one of the few religiously laden themes.

### 3. Constructing a New Islamic Antisemitic Discourse

The pseudo-theological polemics, which developed since the 1920s, served as a tool in the incitement to action against Zionism and the Jews. It created a language and a vocabulary and a reservoir of historical precedents to communicate messages, to interpret the present, and to draw encouragement from the historical Islamic heritage. Examples are abundant, and introduced in numerous works (e.g., Holtzman and Schlossberg 2008; Litvak 1998; Yadlin 1989, pp. 41–62). According to historian Boris Havel, the Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin Husayni was the first prominent Arab leader and cleric who based his anti-Jewish incitement on the early Islamic texts, but he also reportedly memorized the text of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and combined it in his speeches with other political and religious arguments, depending on the audience (Havel 2014. See also Achcar 2010, pp. 128–53; Küntzel 2007, pp. 31–34). Husayni interpreted Zionism as only the most recent of the supposed age-old Jewish hostility not only to the Palestinians or Arabs as modern national groups but also to the religion of Islam. His lasting accomplishment, according to historian Jeffrey Herf, was “to fuse secular Arab anti-Zionism with the Islamist and thus theologically inspired hatred of the Jews and Judaism” (Herf 2015). The propaganda he disseminated in Arabic through millions of leaflets and radio programs during World War II from Germany, where he found refuge in November 1941, was replete with Islamic anti-Jewish themes (Herf 2009; Küntzel 2007, pp. 34–43).

Aiming basically at undermining the Zionist claims over Palestine, and delegitimizing the state of Israel, historians, religious scholars, preachers, and journalists became obsessively preoccupied with the Jews, resulting in a vast body of scholarly and popular works on:

- Jewish history and its links to Palestine;
- The roots of contemporary Jews and their relation to Children of Israel;
- The alleged misconceptions and falsifications of the Torah by the Jews;
- The encounter between Muslims and Jews in the early days of Islam, according to the Qur’an and Islamic tradition;
- The age-old Jewish hostility towards Islam and Muslims;
- The Torah and the Talmud as the sources of Jewish mentality;
- The Jews’ inherent evil traits and behavior.

This portrayal of the Jews led to the inevitable conclusion, which is part and parcel of the Islamists’ ideology that the conflict between the Jews and Muslims is irreconcilable and the destruction of Israel is not only destined according to the Qur’an but also imperative in order to save humanity and civilization (Webman forthcoming). Jews were depicted as meek, coward and doomed to misery and humiliation,<sup>10</sup> on the one hand, and as warmongers and traitors, who betrayed their prophets and even killed

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Ali Muhammad Hasan, Letter to the editor, *al-Risala*, 15 October 1945, p. 1132.

them,<sup>11</sup> on the other hand. They are stubborn, corrupt, and arrogant, as they consider themselves the “Chosen People”, looking condescendingly and hatefully at other peoples (Al-Jayyar 1947, pp. 78–80). They were violators of agreements, blood-suckers, “descendants of apes and pigs” (based on several Qur’anic verses which state that some Jews were turned into apes and pigs by God, as a punishment for violating the Sabbath), disseminators of corruption on earth and “enemies of God and humanity” (Litvak 1998, pp. 150–52; Webman 1994, pp. 1–16; Milson 2004).

The polemics against the Jews and the Children of Israel in the Qur’an “serves as a basis for the negative reconstruction of the Jewish character”, and provides “an explanation for the Zionist successes, the offence in Palestine, and the political and economic Jewish domination in other parts of the world” (Taji-Farouki 1998, p. 15). The Jews’ characteristics have remained constant since they were described in the Qur’an. “The Jew is unrepentant in his war against Muhammad, and whether cooperating with infidels against the Prophet’s mission, or whether clothed in the rags of a miser engaged in usury, or whether in an Israeli officer’s uniform, he has not changed and will not change. He will always be a swindler, a miser, despicable, and arrogant, a person who subverts justice, morality and humanity” (Abraham 1974, p. 135).

The Islamic organs were a central platform for the polemics against the Jews. Hamas’s mouthpiece *Filastin al-Muslima*, Hizballah’s *al-‘Ahd* (replaced by *al-‘Ahd al-Intiqad*) Jordanian weekly *al-Sabil* and defunct Egyptian bi-weekly *al-Sha‘b* during the 1990s dealt excessively with the so-called cultural-religious assault—the alleged endeavor of Jews to destroy religions and moral values. *Filastin al-Muslima* published, for example, a 10-parts article entitled “This is how the Prophet spoke of the Jews”, dwelling on the Jews’ hostility to Islam since Muhammad’s days, their evil behavior, the wrath of God on them, the punishments inflicted on them, and the danger they pose.<sup>12</sup> In another series of articles analyzing the encounter of Muhammad with the Jews of Medina, the author Muhsin ‘Abd al-Hamid, a Baghdad University professor, repeated the claims that they had betrayed him, rejected him, and plotted against him and against the new religion. The Prophet warned in the Qur’an that the “Jews are the most hostile to the believers”, although he was lenient towards them since they were considered the People of the Book.<sup>13</sup>

The Islamist media outlets did not resort only to Islamic sources to portray Jewish evil intention and deeds. In many cases, they combined religious and national arguments or Islamic Judeophobia with imported Western antisemitic tropes. An example of such a combination was a two-part article on Jewish corruption, entitled “This is how the Jews Planned to Spread Corruption in the Muslim World; the Jews and Sexual Permissiveness”.<sup>14</sup> ‘Abd al-Hamid purported to prove that Jews exploited the femininity of women throughout their history as a means to gain dominance and serve their interests. As proof, he cited the case of Queen Esther, who was used as a ploy by her uncle to reach power and get rid of the Jews’ enemies. In more modern times, he claimed, the Jews exploited the crucial historical moment of transformation from feudalism to capitalism to dominate the industrial movement and then carefully planned how to drive the Christians away from their religion and damage their moral values. Worship of gold substituted the worship of God. New non-religious social organizations based on man’s bestiality were set up. This led to the final separation of religion from society and the complete domination of the Jews over modern civilization. Under the banner of equal rights and progress, Jewish conspiracies, aimed at demolishing man’s civility, created the female revolution. The new state of permissibility and feminine challenge to man were manifested in various ways, brought about the dissemination of diseases and shattered family life in the West. The Jews were behind all the

<sup>11</sup> ‘Ali Muhammad Hasan, “The story of the Children of Israel in the venerable Qur’an,” *al-Risala*, 19 November 1945, pp. 1265–66.

<sup>12</sup> Ibrahim al-‘Ali, “This is how the Prophet spoke of the Jews: The Early Enmity of the Jews to Islam,” *Filastin al-Muslima*, January–October 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Muhsin ‘Abd al-Hamid, “The Position of Judaism towards Islam and the Muslims,” *Filastin al-Muslima*, March–May 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Muhsin ‘Abd al-Hamid, “This is how the Jews Planned to Spread Corruption in the Muslim World; the Jews and Sexual Permissiveness,” *Filastin al-Muslima*, June–July 1995.

revolutions to achieve full political, economic, and social domination. Now the planning centers of international Judaism and the Masonic societies were targeting Muslim women in an attempt to shake the moral values of Muslim society, as they did in the West.

This kind of polemics found in scholarly works as well as in newspapers, television channels and other media outlets differs from the traditional Islamic polemics, as Holtzman and Schlossberg show in their study:

- It is a one-sided polemic. The author presents his arguments but those do not receive any serious response and they are not debated;
- It is found in the popular print media, whereas in the past it was a formal genre written in the form of chapters of books against various religions;
- It is conducted by politicians, publicists, and representatives of Islamic movements, whereas in the past the debaters were primarily members of the religious establishment, as well as philosophers and intellectuals;
- Contemporary debaters challenge, attack, cite, and quote the Talmud, whereas in the past Muslim polemicists attacked, cited and quoted the Old Testament scriptures;
- The modern polemic is not exclusively religious, but includes antisemitic themes adopted from the Western classical and racist vocabulary;
- Modern religious polemics generally serves political purposes and uses holy Muslim scriptures to negate the "Other" rather than proving the superiority of the Islamic religion. (Holtzman and Schlossberg 2008, pp. 14–15).

Moreover, it seems that the modern polemics does not shy from inventing tradition and defying Islamic scriptures. The designation of Palestine as a religious endowment, *waqf*, is a modern invention, aimed at preventing any concession of any part of the land in any future agreement with Israel. Similarly, *jihad* was traditionally perceived as an obligation upon Muslims (*fard kifaya*) from which the majority are relieved, but *jihad* in Palestine turned into a personal duty incumbent on every Muslim (*fard 'ayn*). The denial of Jewish roots also contradicts Islamic scriptures. It gradually developed in response to the establishment of the state of Israel. Early attempts to challenge Zionists' claims to Palestine by Muslim scholars as Gribetz shows, did not deny Jewish historical roots and link to Jerusalem. Rashid Rida opposed Zionism because it threatened to dislodge Muslims and Christians from Palestine and to replace the al-Aqsa Mosque with a new Jewish temple. He developed a strong antipathy towards Zionism which verged on antisemitism, but he could not dismiss revelation. Therefore, he drew from the Qur'anic texts the unfavorable references to portray them as hypocritical, treacherous, and hostile to Muslims. He also resorted to more contemporary themes, accusing them of responsibility for all subversive movements and ideologies which led to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, adopting the spirit and the letter of the Protocols without explicitly naming them (Gribetz 2014, pp. 168–69; Haim 1984, p. 49).

Muslim scholars and intellectuals were aware of the discrepancy between the claim that today's Jews are not the descendants of the Children of Israel, and the insistence on the inherent negative traits of the Jews, and addressed it as Rivka Yadlin showed in her study. The way to support the notion of continuity in character and still deny the Jews' ancestral connection to the Bible's Israelites is to explain the continuity in behavioral terms. "One might legitimately view the character of the Jews as a fixed phenomenon since their behavior today fits their description in the Qur'an. Jewish behavior, although its methods and means may change, remains the same in contemporary and ancient history. Continuity, therefore, is not biological but rather ideational and moral" (Yadlin 1989, p. 47).

#### 4. Conclusions

Just before finalizing this article, by the end of February 2019, another crisis developed around the Temple Mount. A new mosque opened for prayer in the Bab al-Rahma (the Gate of Mercy) building which had been closed for 16 years, in defiance of the delicate status quo, leading to clashes



between Israeli police and Palestinian leaders and activists, and threatening to fuel yet another bloody confrontation. The *waqf* leadership of the Haram al-Sharif issued calls to Palestinians to attend the Friday prayers en masse, ignoring Israeli warnings.<sup>15</sup> Concomitantly, a group of Palestinian Islamic scholars issued a *fatwa* on 3 March 2019, warning against any form of normalization with the ‘Zionist entity.’ This was done to thwart the prospective US American plan, known as the “Deal of the Century”, and to prevent Arabs from establishing normal relations with Israel. “Normalization and reconciliation mean empowerment of Jews over the land of the Muslims, surrender to the infidels and loss of religion and Islamic lands”, and contradict the Qur’an, they warned.<sup>16</sup> It seems that the same methods and tools persist since the first encounters between Jews and Arabs in the 1920s.

In their discussion of the role of religion in interstate or interethnic conflicts worldwide, Hillel Frisch and Shmuel Sandler argue that however infused those conflicts are with religious substance, they remain essentially national or state-centered. “While religion expresses prominent primordial values, the points of contention continue to be territorially centered and the dominant discourse, especially in the international arena, is usually more nationalist or statist than religious and theocratic.” Referring to al-Aqsa intifada, Frisch and Sandler reinforce the findings of this work, showing “that even though religious claims and symbols were important on both sides, they were consistently eclipsed by nationalist or realist discourses, claims, and symbols” (Frisch and Sandler 2004, p. 77). Basically, this is true also as to the antisemitic themes. Despite the disseminated Judeophobic content, the Christian and Western antisemitic themes in Arab discourse are more prominent due to their universality, pervasiveness, and persistence. Even the antisemitic nature of many Islamic radical movements, asserted Olivier Roy, “has more to do with a Western and secular antisemitism than with the theological anti-Judaism of Islam . . . Radical Muslims (and many moderate conservatives or even left-wing Arab secularists) quote the Protocols of the Elders of Zion or Holocaust-denial European authors such as Irving and Garaudy more than medieval Muslim theologians” (Roy 2004, p. 49).

An unpublished research on radical Islam held in the framework of a project on “Religious Actors in Conflict Areas”, examined the British Muslim Brotherhood to establish to what extent radical Islam’s animosity to Israel derived from classic Islam, an indigenous component, and what had been the role of other, modern and exogenous, components. Using the method of computerized text mining to survey 20,000 articles in the Muslim Brotherhood website *ikhwanweb.com*, the study discovered that Jews and Israel had been first and foremost associated with the Arab–Israeli conflict—42% of the occurrences; followed by modern European antisemitism—33%; and classical Islam comes only in the third place—less than 25%. An indigenous factor, namely the classic heritage contributes less than European antisemitism and that is in the discourse of an Islamist movement. The finding suggests that there is a wide gap, perhaps unconscious, between ideology and practice, and correlates with the conclusion that the most common antisemitic themes even among Islamists are not necessarily those based on Islamic sources (Sivan and Pardo 2012).

Very little has changed in the repertoire and content of Arab antisemitism since its early manifestations. However, in view of the growing aversion towards Islamism in Arab societies, and regional and global strategic changes, the monolithic discourse which typified the period from 1967 to the 21st century has been cracked, and perhaps it is returning to the more diversified attitudes towards the Jews in earlier periods.

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<sup>15</sup> Haaretz, 19, 25, 27 February, 4–8, 13, 17 March 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Khaled Abu Toameh, “Palestinians: No Peace or Reconciliation with the ‘Infidels’,” *Gatestone*, 4 March 2019, accessed 5 March 2019, at <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/13827/palestinians-peace-infidels>.



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Article

# The Centrality of Antisemitism in the Islamic State's Ideology and Its Connection to Anti-Shiism

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**Abstract:** The Islamic State (ISIS) has repeatedly targeted Jews in terrorist attacks and incited against Jews in its propaganda. Antisemitism and the belief that Jews are engaged in a war against Islam has been central to Islamist thought since its inception. Islamist antisemitism exposes the influence of both Western conspiracy theories and Islamic traditions. This article studies the anti-Semitic themes propagated by ISIS and investigates their ideological foundations. It bases itself on an analysis of articles published in *Dabiq*, ISIS' English language online magazine in the period 2014–2016. This study shows that ISIS' relationship with Western-inspired anti-Semitic conspiracy theories is inconsistent, vacillating between rejection and acceptance. ISIS holds an apocalyptic, anti-Semitic worldview, which claims that the Shia denomination is a Jewish invention to sow disunity among Muslims and that Shia and Jews are working together to destroy Islam. ISIS' antisemitism and anti-Shiism are thus inherently connected. It is vital to correctly assess the anti-Semitic ideological foundations of contemporary Islamism and Jihadism to best understand the movement. Learning about this will help lawmakers, scholars and practitioners develop strategies to deal with these movements and counter their message.

**Keywords:** Islamic State; ISIS; antisemitism; anti-Shiism; Islamism; terrorism; genocide; radicalization

## 1. Introduction

Since 2014, Islamic State (ISIS) terrorists and sympathizers, who pledged allegiance to the group, have repeatedly targeted Jews in Western countries. In May 2014, an ISIS foreign terrorist fighter stormed a Jewish Museum in Brussels, murdering four individuals. In January 2015, an ISIS sympathizer took several people hostage at a kosher supermarket in Paris, murdering four others. One month later, an ISIS sympathizer shot at a free speech event and later at a synagogue, murdering two, including the synagogue's security guard (Ellis 2015). On 13 November 2015, ISIS terrorists murdered 130 people in several attacks. Most victims were killed in the Bataclan theatre. Due to its former Jewish, pro-Israeli owners, anti-Israeli and Islamist groups repeatedly planned on attacking the theatre (Le Point 2015). In March 2016 in Brussels, ISIS attacks killed 32 people; one suicide bomber specifically targeted two Orthodox Jews at the airport, who were both injured in the attack (Carmichael 2017). There were also several lower-profile attacks on Jews. In January 2016, for instance, an ISIS sympathizer tried to decapitate a kippah-wearing Jewish man in Marseille (Haguesher 2017). Security services prevented many other terrorist attacks.

In the US, ISIS sympathizers repeatedly plotted attacks on Jewish communities (Barsky 2016, pp. 72–73). In December 2018, police arrested an ISIS sympathizer for planning an attack on a synagogue in Toledo, Ohio. His immediate inspiration was the October 27 attack on a Pittsburgh synagogue, where a white supremacist murdered eleven congregants. The prospective terrorist told an FBI undercover agent: "I admire what the guy did with the shooting actually. [...] I can see myself

carrying out this type of operation inshallah” (Department of Justice U.S. Attorney’s Office Northern District of Ohio 2018). What was the rationale behind these actions? For years, ISIS cultivated hatred of Jews and other non-Muslims in its propaganda outlets. Its videos, articles, and songs are a source of fantasies for violence, which inspire its followers globally. In this vein, ISIS repeatedly calls for the murder of Jews, such as it did in 2015: “Stab the Jew with a knife or run over him with a car, poison him, bring back explosives, [. . . make use of] explosive belts and IEDs, burn their faces and their houses” (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center 2015, p. 2).

ISIS’ acts of religious violence defy standard definitions of terrorism, which tend to see terrorism as the rational use of violence to achieve a political goal.<sup>1</sup> However, many have noticed that Islamist terrorism, especially after 9/11, did not fit these traditional definitions. Terrorism was no longer primarily a strategic tool to advance political interests, as it had been during earlier terrorist waves (Rapoport 2004). Jihadi groups like Al-Qaeda see their actions as a sacred duty and deny the humanity of their enemies. Killing civilians—as many and as gruesomely as possible—became a goal in itself. As the Canadian political scientist Barry Copper succinctly put it back in 2005: “The chief practical consequences of taking part in a cosmic struggle with a satanic enemy is that the enemy must be extinguished” (Cooper 2005, p. 57). Since 9/11, terrorism became deadlier, as different Islamist terrorist groups competed for the highest death toll. ISIS can be considered a culmination of this development of sacralization of violence.

Because they prioritize ritual over strategic violence, Jihadi terrorist groups have proven ineffective in reaching political goals. Both Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State miscalculated the consequences of their actions, resulting in the destruction of the Al-Qaeda safe haven in Afghanistan and the Islamic State in Iraq/Syria.

These observations do not imply that Jihadi groups are irrational, but that the rationale of their actions can only be studied and understood within the framework of their ideology. The indiscriminate targeting of Westerners, Jews, and non-Sunni-Muslims can be rationalized by the belief that they are part of a global war to destroy Islam, which Islamists and Jihadists tend to maintain (Rickenbacher 2019). Terrorizing these groups then serves the purpose of undermining their morale and deterring them from continuing their war against Islam.<sup>2</sup> Even extreme violence can seem justified to some under these circumstances.

ISIS is, in fact, genocidal in its ambitions, as it makes repeatedly clear both in words and actions. Thus, ISIS warned that if it was to conquer Europe, it would perpetrate a genocide against the Jews overshadowing the horrors of the Holocaust: “The clear difference between Muslims and the corrupt and deviant Jews and Christians is that Muslims are not ashamed of abiding by the rules sent down from their Lord regarding war and enforcement of divine law. [. . .] As for the treacherous Jews of Europe and elsewhere—those who would betray their covenant—then their post-pubescent males would face a slaughter that would make the Holocaust sound like a bedtime story, as their women would be made to serve their husbands’ and fathers’ killers” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2016a, p. 80). These are not empty words. When ISIS had the chance, it perpetrated genocide against the Yazidi. It also continues to perpetrate mass slaughter against Christians and the Shia.

This article seeks to understand the ideological foundations of this hatred based on an analysis of articles published in *Dabiq*, an English language online magazine that ISIS edited between July 2014 and July 2016. Its articles covered ISIS’ theological and political reflections and dealt with important events in the history of the Islamic State. Its primary function was to provide religious justifications for

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<sup>1</sup> Probably the most quoted definition of terrorism was written by Bruce Hoffman: “We may therefore now attempt to define terrorism as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change. All terrorist acts involve violence or the threat of violence. Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack. It is meant to instill fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider ‘target audience’ [. . .].” (Hoffman 2006, pp. 40–41).

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the anonymous reviewer for underlining this element of rationality in Jihadist violence.

ISIS' actions (Gambhir 2014, p. 2). *Dabiq* articles afford insight into ISIS thought and self-presentation vis-à-vis its followers and the larger world, providing an excellent sample to study ISIS' justifications for religious hatred and violence. Notwithstanding the destruction of its caliphate, ISIS and its ideology are likely to endure, which makes it all the more important to understand its belief system.

## 2. ISIS' Ambivalence toward the 'Jewish-Western War Against Islam' Conspiracy Theory

Jews occupy a special place in Islamist thought. Islamists believe in a worldwide Jewish-Western conspiracy to destroy Islam. In the process of formulating this theory, Islamist movements extensively adopted anti-Semitic European conspiracy theories. Sayyid Qutb, one proponent of the theory, claimed in his pamphlet 'Our Struggle with the Jews [Arab. "Ma'rakatuna ma'a al-Yahud"] that the Jews had been involved in a cosmic war to destroy Islam since its founding (Tibi 2010, pp. 11–14). That Qutb challenged Islam's discriminatory but protected status assigned to the Jews as a people of the book [Arab. "Ahl al-kitāb"] is a testament to the depth of Qutb's antisemitism. The Hamas Charter famously quotes the Protocols of the Elders of Zion directly. Abdallah Azzam, the founder of Al-Qaeda, was another believer. He created the terrorist group to counter this global war by the "Crusader-Jewish alliance" (Rickenbacher 2019, pp. 166–67). This adoption of European anti-Semitic thought compromises the Islamist claim that their movement presents a return to the sources of Islam. Political expediency trumped ideological purity.

European conspiracy theories were not the only source for the belief in a global Jewish-Christian war to destroy Islam. Traditional Islamic views envisage a perpetual war, jihad, between Islam and the non-Muslim 'world of war' [Arab. "Dar al-Harb"] until the latter is converted to Islam. According to Islamic law, it is a collective duty [Arab. "Fard al-Kifayah"], meaning a legal obligation, to wage this offensive religious war. In the case of a defensive war, however, Islamic law stipulates that religious war becomes an individual duty [Arab. "Fard al-Ayn"] for every Muslim. In both instances, religious war is administered by an Islamic state, whatever its current political expression (Lewis 1991). Historically, Islamic states were usually reluctant to fight a perpetual war. During the reform period, the Ottoman Empire, the last of the great Islamic empires, increasingly prioritized state interests, only to relapse into religious war in WWI; the young Turks explicitly saw their campaign of extermination against non-Muslim minorities as a jihad, foreshadowing the genocide perpetrated by the Islamic State one hundred years later (Kieser 2018, p. XIV). The secular states, which succeeded the Ottoman Empire, abandoned the 'duty' to wage religious war entirely—much to the chagrin of the pan-Islamic, and later the Islamist movement. Violent Islamist or Jihadists, such as Abdallah Azzam, justified their call for individual jihad, by claiming that they are defending the Islamic world from a war of aggression, especially since there are no states to take on this duty.<sup>3</sup>

Islamic eschatology, in addition to Western conspiracy thought and the traditional Islamic political conception of continued warfare with the non-Muslim world, is another important source for the contemporary 'War against Islam' narrative. It is also the most important influence on ISIS' antisemitism, as I will discuss in the next section. Still, ISIS' relationship with the 'War against Islam' conspiracy theory and conspiracy theories in general, is ambivalent. Many ISIS statements promulgate this theory. On the other hand, there are also dissenting voices. Thus, the author of the remarkable *Dabiq* article 'Conspiracy Theory Shirk' methodologically criticizes the widespread belief in a century-old, global conspiracy against Islam orchestrated by its enemies. He argues that such ideas are un-Islamic and entered the Islamic movement through Arab nationalism (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015a, p. 15). Since the belief in the 'War against Islam' is so fundamental to Islamism and feeds much of its antisemitism, it is worth taking a closer look at the article and its arguments.

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<sup>3</sup> On the evolution of individual jihad in Islamist thought, see (McGregor 2003; Hegghammer 2010).



### 3. Is Conspiracy Theory Shirk?

The author of the article enumerates several reasons why Muslims must reject conspiracy theories. He argues that they serve the enemies of Islam: “The purpose of conspiracy theories is to exaggerate the power of the kuffār [non-Muslims], and thereby the Muslims become paralyzed by analysis of current events and eventually fear the kuffār more than they fear Allah” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015a, p. 19). Furthermore, he argues that while non-Muslims, indeed, conspire against Islam, these actions are usually unsuccessful, since the non-Muslims are disunited and their alliances unstable: “The kuffār are divided, hold animosity and enmity towards each other, carry out violence against each other, humiliate and degrade each other, yet they unite against the Muslims, their common enemy. [...] The kuffār undoubtedly do plot out conspiracies, but these plots are weak due to the fragile relationships the kuffār have with each other” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015a, p. 18). In the view of the author, conflicts between non-Muslims are real. He, therefore, ridicules those “believing that the Christians, Rāfidah [Shia], Jews, and apostates are all covert members of the same secret society, underground political party, or grandiose conspiracy theory, all of them adoring each other and faking their hostilities” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015a, p. 19).

Worst of all, conspiracy theories attribute god-like capabilities to the human enemies of Islam, which effectively amounts to shirk, meaning idolatry, an offense punishable by death: “They do not see all, hear all, know all, control all, and own all, as some individuals try to portray them. Whoever believes that has fallen into shirk” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015a, p. 18). The only being able to organize these sorts of elaborate conspiracies is Allah, who is fighting on the side of Muslims against the non-Muslims: “Rather, they [the non-Muslims] are the object of Allah’s plot against them. [...] Grand conspiracies consist of so many factors only controllable by Allah (ta’ālā). An example of such a grand conspiracy theory is that of September 11th being carried out by the Americans themselves. How many members of the crusader government would have to be under permanent watch to prevent news of the operation getting out before its execution?” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015a, p. 18) Moreover, the author argues that since the enemies of Islam are humans and lack the support of Allah, they cannot keep their conspiracies hidden: “Their real conspiracies always have material evidence and are not based on unsupported deductions—(guessing at the unseen). [...] The real conspiracies were not secrets hidden from mankind. The Iraqi Sahwah openly met with Bush, the Iraqi regime, and Rāfidī leaders” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015a, p. 18).

Interestingly, the article also casts doubt on the belief that Jews are the leaders of the conspiracy of Islam since their status is inferior to both the Muslims and Christians: “This verse explains that the accursed Jews are always in humiliation and overpowered. The Jewish state itself was established for the Jews primarily by the British crusaders. It was through Jewish-crusader relationships and the self-degradation of the Arab apostates that the Jews gained mastery over the Arab tawāghīt [secular Arab regimes]” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015a, p. 18). It would, however, be wrong to conclude that ISIS rejects anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. Their rejection of some conspiracy theories is a function of their agenda to push back against any influences from the Western world.

On the contrary, ISIS statements have repeatedly affirmed the existence of Jewish led ‘War against Islam.’ In September 2014, for instance, ISIS spokesman Mohammad al-Adnani blamed the Jews for the military intervention against the Islamic State. At the proclamation’s start, he quoted Sura 8:30, which discussed plans made by Mohammed’s opponents in Mecca (Al-Adnani 2014). These statements were meant to underscore the conspiratorial, anti-Islamic nature of the non-Muslims, as well as the continuity of the ‘War against Islam’ from the time of the founding of Islam until today. In *Dabiq*’s first issue, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed that “the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy—the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by



America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2014a, p. 10).

Moreover, some of the ISIS’ statements against Jews and Israel are of secular origin; they reflect classical anti-Zionist and Arab nationalist arguments. Thus, in issue four of *Dabiq*, the author writes that “It seems American leaders are blinded by their love of the Jewish state into doing things that only damage supposed Western interests” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2014b, p. 40). Another *Dabiq* article uses Arab nationalist language to attack Zionism: “Zionism feeds this conspiracy to extract Palestine from the body of the Arab nation for whom Palestine is its throbbing heart” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2016b, p. 32). Former US president Barack Obama is also repeatedly graphically portrayed as being close to Israel and the Jews. One picture in *Dabiq* shows him praying with a kippa at the Western Wall (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2014c, p. 36). In another photo he is speaking in front of US and Israeli flags (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2014b, p. 40). These pictures seek to insinuate that Israel and the Jews are in control of the US.

For ISIS, just as for other Islamists, the Jews remain the primary enemies of Islam, even though ISIS outwardly, but inconsistently, rejects the influence of Western conspiracy thought on Islamism. As will be discussed in the next section, ISIS’ main reference point for its own ‘War against Islam’ narrative is Islamic eschatology.

#### 4. The Role of Israel in ISIS’ Thought

There are numerous indications that ISIS sees itself as living at the end of times; even the title of the magazine—*Dabiq*—clearly indicates this. According to Islamic eschatology, the final battle between Muslims and their enemies will take place in the Syrian city of Dabiq (Gambhir 2014, pp. 2–3). Apocalyptic thought is widespread among Islamists, who interpret many events of contemporary history as indications of an impending apocalyptic age. Century cycles repeatedly inspired millennial movements, which sought to restore the glory of Islam (Wessinger 2016, p. 277). The century cycle of 1979, the Islamic year 1400, saw the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Islamist attack on the Great Mosque in Mecca, and the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. This chain of events fired up apocalyptic visions that were massively circulated in the 1980s through audio recordings and pamphlets (Landes 2011).

Several hadiths can be interpreted as prophesizing a global ‘War against Islam’ during the Last Days (Cook 2005, p. 137). Therefore, the belief in the existence of a ‘War against Islam’ and the sense that one lives in an apocalyptic age are connected and mutually invigorating. Moreover, antisemitism plays a prominent role in contemporary apocalyptic literature. The anti-Jewish elements of Islamic apocalyptic thought are no recent innovations: Classical Islamic literature already describes the Dajjal, the Muslim counterpart to the Antichrist, as Jewish. Contemporary apocalyptic literature emphasizes the anti-Semitic nature of the Dajjal narrative: They see the Dajjal and his Jewish followers as leaders of the Jewish conspiracy against Islam (Cook 2016). The above is the narrative which ISIS endorses.

The land of Israel and Jerusalem are central to Islamic apocalyptic thought—as well as to ISIS. According to Islamic eschatology, the Muslims will take refuge from the Antichrist, the Dajjal and his allies, the Jews in the land of Israel. Here Jesus will eventually reappear and defeat the Antichrist, the Dajjal, in a final battle. For these events to take place, the Muslims first must take control of the holy land (Cook 2008, p. 22). ISIS repeatedly makes clear that it subscribes to this apocalyptic vision. In December 2015, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi released a statement, declaring that “We are getting closer to you day by day. [...] Do not think that we have forgotten about you. [...] It is the obligation of every Muslim to carry out Jihad. [...] Jews, you will not enjoy in Palestine. God has gathered you in Palestine so that the Mujahadeen can reach you soon and you will hide by the rock and the tree. Palestine will be your graveyard” (Okbi and Hashavua 2015).

In his statement, Baghdadi alluded to the Gharkad hadith, which is also regularly quoted in *Dabiq* as well as in article seven of the Hamas Charter (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2014d, p. 30). The hadith describes the massacre of the Jews that will take place in the Last Days according to Islamic eschatology: “The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews when the Jew

will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him. Only the Gharkad tree, would not do that because it is one of the trees of the Jews" (Hamas 1988). Moreover, ISIS promises its followers the realization of these prophecies. In 2014, ISIS warned that "it is only a matter of time and patience before it reaches Palestine to fight the barbaric Jews and kill those of them hiding behind the Gharkad trees—the trees of the Jews" (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2014e, p. 4). The mentioned time frame ("only a matter of time") underscores the fact that ISIS sees the Last Days as imminent and, therefore, considers it imperative to attack Israel.

ISIS and its predecessor organizations have tried to attack Israeli targets several times. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Jamaat al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad planned such attacks in Germany in the early 2000s. Moreover, some groups affiliated with ISIS in Gaza shot rockets at Israel, and in one firefight in the Golan, Israel killed several fighters of a group closely connected to ISIS (Wyss 2019). Still, other Islamist groups often criticize ISIS for its limited actions against Israel, spreading anti-Semitic conspiracy theories suggesting that ISIS is allied to Israel or even a covert Israeli operation. In an apparent effort to tackle this criticism, ISIS made statements that seem to accommodate Palestinian nationalism, as mentioned above. On the other hand, it also countered this criticism by arguing that the Islamic world's focus on the Palestinian issue is a legacy of secular Arab nationalism, and therefore must be rejected. Instead, Jihadi groups should focus their efforts on the 'Near Enemy,' meaning the secular Arab regimes in their countries (MEMRI 2019). Given the importance of anti-Semitic eschatological thought in its mindset, ISIS' limited actions against Israel and its denunciations of Arab nationalism do not mean that Israel does not preoccupy ISIS. Instead, the group will continue seeking to attack Israel, either directly or through its affiliates in Egypt and Gaza.

## 5. The Connection between Anti-Shiism and Antisemitism

A virulent anti-Shiism embodies the Islamic State's ideology. Invectives against the Shia, whom ISIS considers to be unbelievers and rejecters of Islam [Arab. "Rāfidah"], fill the pages of *Dabiq*. ISIS directs much of its violence against Shiites. In one of the worst war crimes perpetrated by the ISIS caliphate at Camp Speicher in Iraq in mid-June 2014, Shia soldiers were separated from their Sunni comrades and then executed. The massacre's death toll was estimated to be between 1500 and 1600 people (McKay 2017). Despite the enmity between Iran and Israel, ISIS believes that the Jews and Shias are allies: "And likewise, if the Jews establish a state in Iraq or elsewhere, the Rāfidah would be from their greatest supporters, because they always support the kuffār from the mushrikīn [Engl. "idolators"], the Jews, and the Christians. They help them in fighting and waging war against the Muslims" (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2016c, p. 44). As we will see, ISIS' anti-Shiism is, in fact, closely connected to its antisemitism.

ISIS inherited its anti-Shiism from al-Zarqawi, the leader of Jamaat al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad, which later became Al-Qaeda in Iraq and eventually renamed itself ISIS. During the US occupation of Iraq, al-Zarqawi sought to trigger a civil war by targeting the Shia. This policy was controversial within Al-Qaeda and was, to some extent, at odds with the organization's policies: Osama Bin Laden was inspired by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and Al-Qaeda repeatedly worked with Iran and its proxy, Hezbollah (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States 2004, pp. 240–41).

Zarqawi had to defend his anti-Shia actions in Iraq vis-à-vis Al-Qaeda's leadership. In a letter to al-Zawahiri written in 2005, he accused the Shia of having always worked with the enemies of Islam and of presenting a danger to its existence: "People of discernment and knowledge among Muslims know the extent of danger to Islam of the Twelve'er school of Shiism. It is a religious school based on excess and falsehood whose function is to accuse the companions of Muhammad of heresy in a campaign against Islam, in order to free the way for a group of those who call for a dialogue in the name of the hidden Mahdi who is in control of existence and infallible in what he does. Their prior history in cooperating with the enemies of Islam is consistent with their current reality of connivance with

the Crusaders.”<sup>4</sup> Zarqawi’s statements reflected the widespread and increasingly popular anti-Shiism within Salafism.

This anti-Shiism, to a considerable extent, is an expression of Islamist antisemitism: It adopts elements from the ‘War against Islam’ narrative and anti-Semitic apocalyptic thought.<sup>5</sup> Since the early 1990s, conspiracy theories gained popularity within Salafist circles accusing Shiites of working as agents of the Jews in their endeavor to destroy Islam. They hearken back to old Islamic legends, which claim that the Shiite denomination traces its roots back to Abdullah Ibn Saba, allegedly a Jewish convert to Islam (Mervin et al. 2013, pp. 42–44). Ibn Saba’s portrayal as a Jewish deceiver is almost identical to and probably modeled after the Islamic perception of the Apostle Paul. In Islamic tradition, Apostle Paul is generally seen as having falsified the gospels and corrupted Christianity, distancing it from its monotheistic origins. There are two explanations in Islamic tradition for the Apostle Paul’s motivations. One tradition sees him as an enemy of the Jews, while the other claims that Paul was a pseudo convert, a Jewish deceiver of the Christians (Kuhn 2018, p. 153). In the Islamist reading of these traditions, both Ibn Saba and Apostle Paul are adequately considered agents of the Jewish conspiracy against Islam, who set out to distort Christianity and Shiism and to drive a wedge between the Muslims, meaning the monotheists in this context. This Jewish conspiracy against monotheism—as evidenced by Apostle Paul’s actions mentioned above—actually predates the founding of Islam.

*Dabiq* well represents this worldview. The story of the Jews’ alleged corruption of Christianity and Islam is repeatedly told in its pages. In issue 13 of *Dabiq*, the featured article embraces this topic: “The Jews and the Rāfidah are two sides of the same coin. The religion of Rafd (“Shiism”) was nothing but a plot by a Jew—Ibn Saba—following the footsteps of his Jewish predecessor Paul, who had corrupted the pure religion of the Messiah, leaving the Christians upon the Pauline deviance and heresies of the cross, original sin, incarnation, atonement, the lordship, divine sonhood, and godhead of the Messiah, and antinomianism (abandonment of the Law of Mūsā). [...] The Jew Ibn Saba’, like Paul, hated Islam and desired to deviate the Muslims and corrupt their religion by innovating deviant concepts including the godhood, lordship, and second coming of ‘Alī Ibn Abī Tālib. At the same time, he strived to create strife amongst the Muslim ranks” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2016c, p. 33).

At the End of Days, Shias and Jews will reveal their true colors and unite to fight Islam, as described in several articles. According to *Dabiq*, “it is expected that the Rāfidah will ally blatantly with the Jews in the future in their war against Islam and the Muslims” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015c, p. 17). In ISIS’ view, the Shia Mahdi, the final redeemer of the world, is identical with the Jewish Dajjal: “Their plan is to continue waging war against Islam until the emergence of the ‘Mahdi’ of the Rāfidah, who, according to them, will speak Hebrew, rule by the Torah, be followed by the Jews, and kill all the Arabs—attributes undoubtedly befitting the Jewish Dajjal, not the Muslim Mahdi” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2015b, p. 52). “They will continue to wage war against the Muslims until the Rāfidah ultimately unite with the Jews under the banner of the Dajjal. [...] Finally, the Rāfidah await the Jewish Dajjal, who they plot to support alongside the Jews against the Muslim” (Islamic State and Al-Hayat Media Center 2016c, pp. 44–45). The fact that ISIS believes that the alliance between the Shia and the Jews is already happening in the present underscores that it believes itself to be living in an apocalyptic age.

## 6. Conclusions

Western anti-Semitic conspiracy theories profoundly influenced Islamist thought, challenging their claim that they represent a return to a pure form of Islam. ISIS, which tries to justify all its present

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance the anti-Shia passages in (Al-Zarqawi 2005).

<sup>5</sup> As in the case of the forged Protocols of the Elders of Qom, a document claiming to reveal a secret Shiite plan to destroy Sunni Islam. Antisemitism is a clear inspiration, even though Jews are not even mentioned in the document. See Menahem Milson, (Milson 2011).

actions through Islamic scripture, has recognized that a belief in such conspiracy theories is problematic from a religious fundamentalist point of view. Still, ISIS propaganda repeatedly promulgates classic anti-Semitic themes, such as Jewish control of the US. Moreover, ISIS' skepticism towards the influence of Western conspiracy theories on Islamism does not imply that ISIS is not steeped deeply in a conspiratorial worldview. Believing itself to live at the end of times, ISIS is primarily influenced by anti-Semitic eschatological thought, which has gained popularity in the Islamic World in the last three decades. It believes that both Christianity and in particular Shiism were created by Jewish deceivers. At the end of times, the Shia and the Jews will work together to destroy Islam.

Much like the political religions of the twentieth century, ISIS perverts the hierarchy of victim and perpetrator by presenting itself as engaged in a defensive war against the mortal enemies of Islam. This worldview serves as justification for ISIS' extreme violence against Jews, Shia, 'Crusaders,' meaning Christians, and other non-Muslims. The Global Terrorist Database counted more than 150 targeted attacks by ISIS against Christian and other religious sites since the group's inception until the end of 2017. On 21 April 2019, Easter Sunday, more than 250 people died in terrorist attacks on churches and hotels in Sri Lanka, for which ISIS claimed responsibility. The UN estimates that ISIS murdered about 5000 Yazidis in what amounts to the Yazidi Genocide. ISIS' genocidal actions and fantasies are a testament to the danger millennial Islamist movements present and to the need to counter them.

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Article

# Antisemitism in the Muslim Intellectual Discourse in South Asia

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**Abstract:** South Asia (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan) has produced some of the greatest Islamic thinkers, such as Shah Wali Allah (sometimes also spelled Waliullah; 1702–1763) who is considered one of the originators of pan-Islamism, Rahmatullah Kairanwi (1818–1892), Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), Syed Abul A'la Mawdudi (also spelled Maududi; 1903–1979), and Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadwi (1914–1999), who have all played a pivotal role in shaping political Islam and have all had global impact. Islamism is intertwined with Muslim antisemitism. Some of the greatest Islamist movements have their bases in South Asia, such as Tablīghī Jamā'at—the largest Sunni Muslim revivalist (*daw'a*) movement in the world—and Jamā'at-i-Islāmi—a prototype of political Islam in South Asia. The region is home to some of the most important institutions of Islamic theological studies: Darul Ulūm Deoband, the alleged source of ideological inspiration to the Taliban, and Nadwātu'l-'Ulamā and Firangi Mahal, whose curricula are followed by seminaries across the world attended by South Asian Muslims in their diaspora. Some of the most popular Muslim televangelists have come from South Asia, such as Israr Ahmed (1932–2010) and Zakir Naik (b. 1965). This paper gives an introductory overview of antisemitism in the Muslim intellectual discourse in South Asia.

**Keywords:** antisemitism; Muslim; Islamic; Islamist; Islamism; Jewish; Jews; South Asia; India; Pakistan

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## 1. Introduction

Yulia Egorova's *Jews and Muslims in South Asia: Reflections on Difference, Religion, and Race* (2018) is the first ever monograph-length study of both Jewish–Muslim relations in South Asia and a comparison of their status in that part of the world. However, it only touches upon antisemitism among certain sections of Muslims there. Generally, scholars pay disproportionately far more attention to the Middle East when it comes to antisemitism than to South Asia, home to one-third of the global Muslim population. Faisal Devji points out the underestimation of the importance of non-Arab Muslims and of non-Arab Islam to the Middle East. He cites the example of Iraq in early 2005, when an Iranian, Ayatullah Sistani emerged as a great Shia authority there. He owes much of his authority in Iraq to the control and disbursement of funds raised by Shia populations elsewhere, particularly South Asia. Devji adds that the notion that the Arab Middle East is the original homeland of radical Islam is rendered nonsensical by the presence of large non-Arab working populations in the Persian Gulf countries, as well as by the domination of non-Arab Muslims in the formulation and spread of Islamic ideas across the world, especially in languages such as English (Devji 2005, p. 22). Given the numerical insignificance of Jews in South Asia, it does not surprise that antisemitism there is more often than not overlooked by scholars. However, this is not how it ought to be, given the fact that some of the major ideological roots of Islamist jihadist ideology, of which antisemitism is an integral part, lie in this region. The region is also home to some of the largest Islamist movements, such as Tablighi Jama'at, the largest Sunni Muslim revivalist (*daw'a*) movement in the world; Jama'at-i-Islami, a prototype of political Islam in South Asia; Darul Ulūm Deoband, the alleged source of ideological inspiration to the Taliban; and



Nadwātu'l-'Ulamā of Lucknow. Islamic revival (*ihya'*) is a response to Western and secular trends by supporting an increased influence of Islamic values on the modern world. The solution to all the ills of Islamic societies and modern society as a whole is viewed to be a return to Islam in its purest form.

There have also been occasions when the antisemitism in South Asia has led to attacks on Jews, such as the ones in Karachi, coinciding with the Arab–Israeli wars in 1948, 1956, and 1967; the attempt to abduct seven Israeli tourists in Kashmir in 1991, during which one of them was killed and three severely wounded (Weinraub 1991); the murder of Daniel Pearl in Pakistan in 2002 (Ansari 2004); the attack on Beit Chabad in Mumbai in 2008 (Sharma 2009); and the explosion of an Israeli diplomat's car in Delhi in 2012 (Singh 2012). The only country in South Asia to have a Jewish community is India, where the population is estimated to be around 5000–10,000. Precisely because of the fact that there is hardly any Jewish presence in the areas that house those who indulge in antisemitic rhetoric, they can do so uninhibited without any fear of being checked. South Asia is a “safe area for casual hatred”, as Atishi Taseer describes his father Salmaan Taseer's world, where people can voice ugly opinions about the weak and the marginalized, numerically or politically, without challenge, comforted by homogeneity. Taseer recounts in his memoir cum travelogue, *Stranger to History* (2009), how his father, who served as the Governor of Punjab, the most populous state in Pakistan, from 2008 to 2011, minimized the scale of the Holocaust (Taseer 2009). In 2009, *Aag* (2009) and *Rashtriya Sahara* (Qutubullah 2009), the two most widely read Urdu daily newspapers in Lucknow, a major center of Muslim scholarship, carried front-page stories denying the Holocaust with the aim of sabotaging an ongoing Holocaust film retrospective there, without any fear of legal action against them. In the latest example, during the Indian parliamentary elections in India in May 2019, Asif Muhammad Khan of the Indian National Congress party, a former member of the legislative assembly of Delhi, tried to depict Atishi Marlena, a contestant from a rival party, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), as Jewish, in spite of the fact that she is not. He believed that the Muslim voters of the concerned constituency would see it as a disqualifier, and thus, these insinuations would influence the election result. She eventually lost. According to Khan, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians are brothers to each other but not Jews. He was captured in a video that is available online proclaiming that a Jew has no place in India and that people have to spread this message to every household (Okhla Times 2019). Interestingly, the view that Jews are not a part of the Indian nation was also expressed by Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906–1973) way back in the year 1939 in his book *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*. Golwalkar was the supreme director of the Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS) from 1940 to 1973. He asserted that India is Hindustan, a land of Hindus where Muslims and Christians are invaders and Jews and Parsis are guests. It was absolutely clear to him as to what he wanted the invaders and guests to do:

... the foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture ... or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges. (Golwalkar 1939)

Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister of India, seen by many as a friend to Jews and Israel (Wald and Kandel 2017, p. 23), is a member of the RSS. In the imaginations of the Hindu right, Egorova explains, Israelis “thematized as Jews, are seen as the enemy of Palestinians, thematized as Muslims, and therefore as the friends of the Indian state, construed as the state of the Hindus” (Egorova 2018, p. 15). Indian Jewish scholar and novelist, Jael Silliman, who divides her time between India and the United States (US), recounts in her book *Jewish Portraits, Indian Frames* (2001) how her Indian identity was once challenged by a progressive Indian friend. While attending a meeting in the US, during one session, Silliman doodled an intricate Indian design, which caught the attention of a colleague who complimented Silliman by saying, “Indians are so artistic”. Immediately, a friend of Silliman's interjected: “But Jael is not really Indian”. Silliman writes that the callous remark pained her, and she responded sharply: “Since when have you joined the Jan Sangh?” Silliman writes that both of them knew what it meant. Jan Sangh was a Hindu nationalist party whose contemporary avatar is

the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which currently leads the coalition National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the center in India. Both Jan Sangh and its successor, the BJP, are known for their anti-minority political rhetoric. Although her friend “backed off and shamefacedly mumbled an apology of sorts, her remark stayed with” Silliman “as a symbol of a larger phenomenon, the attempts underway to remake India into a Hindu nation.” To Silliman it displayed how a narrow view of who is Indian had gained ground over the decades, marking a decisive shift “from the inclusive rhetoric of the anti-colonial leaders after Indian independence” (Silliman 2001, p. 167).

Khan can be heard saying to a crowd in the aforementioned video that they may vote for the political party AAP, but he would find it objectionable if they voted for a Jew. The Election Commission of India took no notice of this antisemitism. Instead of condemning this blatant antisemitism, a senior leader of Marlena’s party, Manish Sisodia, Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi, tried his best to prove that she was a Hindu Rajput and not a Jew. Interestingly, Marlena did exactly the same. She condemned this false rumor of her Jewishness but not the inherent antisemitism in the accusations and went on to talk of her Kshatriya (Hindu warrior class) lineage. The Indian National Congress also did not bother to condemn what their former Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) said about Jews not having any place in India. In another video, Khan is heard saying, to great applause from his audience, that a Jew can never lead Muslims and that there is no place for Jews in the hearts of Muslims. “This is what our Qur’an says” (Zee News 2019). In an interview he gave to a television channel, he explains that the only people mentioned in the Qur’an are Jews, and based on the scripture, it is his belief that Muslims can never follow the leadership of a Jew. Hence, he was opposed to Marlena’s candidacy (Asif Muhammad Khan 2019). This clearly illustrates how Islamic scripture has been interpreted/misinterpreted or reinterpreted, particularly after the creation of the modern state of Israel. The impact of modernism and colonialism, the rise of Arab nationalism and Zionism, and the defeat of the Arab states at the hands of Israel in several wars provided conditions conducive for the enhancement of anti-Jewish hostility, the entrenchment of antisemitic perceptions, and their amalgamation or fusion with polemics in the scripture (Webman 2017, p. 190). There were calls for *jihād* against Israel/Jews across the Arab world, including the Maghreb, in 1948. In response to those calls thousands set off to fight. A strong dose of antisemitism accompanied the jihadism of 1948. In order to make the antisemitic quotient stronger, during the 1930s and 1940s, different variants of the following *hadith* were quoted in Islamic tracts: “The day of resurrection does not come until Muslims fight against Jews, until the Jews hide behind trees and stones and until the trees and stones shout out: ‘O Muslim, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him’” (Morris 2015, p. 403). There are a number of references to the religious and moral deficiencies of Jews in the Qur’an, but the Qur’an does not portray Jews solely in negative terms. However, matters changed with the rise of Zionism, the establishment of the state of Israel, and its repeated victories over Arab (“Muslim”) armies in the twentieth century. “These developments”, as Gudrun Kramer points out, “changed the frame of reference for Muslim authors writing with the explicit aim of presenting the Islamic position on Judaism and the Jews” (Kramer 2006, p. 268). It is a phenomenon that did not originate exclusively in the Arab world nor did it spread from there to the rest of the Muslim world, but rather, it emerged simultaneously in both the Middle East and South Asia, though it gained strength as a result of Arab influences. Mehnaz Afridi, an American Muslim scholar of Pakistani origin, gives us a rough idea of how deep-rooted antisemitism is now among Muslims in South Asia, with the exception of those Muslims, miniscule in number, who are in direct contact with Jews as neighbors in certain places in India:

Antisemitism is everywhere, like smog that hangs in the air—thick, dirty, and choking. Even in Karachi, where I was born, the Jews are everywhere, although they have not lived there as a community of any size in several hundred years. Hatred and suspicion of Jews is in the schoolroom, the pulpit, the media, and even at the butcher’s shop in the dense Karachi marketplace, where, as I recall, the butcher blamed the spread of bird flu on Jews on a poster as one walked into the Sunday bazaar. (Afridi 2017, p. 182)

In the present paper, I discuss how antisemitism figures in the Muslim intellectual discourse in South Asia, primarily in India and Pakistan. Antisemitism has emerged as an integral part of political Islam or Islamism in modern times. Bassam Tibi considers Islamism at its core a form of Jew hatred because of its belief that “the Jews” rule the world and hence are in conflict with Islam (Tibi 2012b, p. 226). In an approach of self-victimization, the ‘guilt’ of the misery of Islamic civilization is attributed to ‘crusaders and Jews’, and therefore, Islamists prefer to engage in polemics against them (Tibi 2012a, p. 154). Faisal Devji cautions us against understanding political Islam in a genealogical mode and questions its credibility. He points out that there are situations when participants in the *jihād* (against the Judeo-Christian West and those who are perceived as acting in the interest of the West) come from diverse national and religious backgrounds. It is something that is “either downplayed or erased outright” in the process in order to project a sense of purity on the lines of race, religion, and region while drawing a genealogy of political Islam. In such situations, the importance Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979), a South Asian Sunni, holds for both Shias, such as Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini (c. 1900–1989), and prominent Salafi thinkers, such as the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), emerges as an inconvenient fact (Devji 2005, p. 24).

Islamist antisemitism emerged along with Islamic revivalism. The development of Islamic revivalism as a social movement and the life histories and intellectual contributions of particular individuals are intertwined. These individuals advanced the formative ideas. They were the ones who voiced the concerns of various social groups and molded public debates by selecting certain ideas while rejecting others. They produced an ideology that uses social impulses to make a new discourse possible. Some of the most important of these ideologues came from South Asia. They are critical to understanding Islamism and the antisemitism inherent in it (Nasr 1996, p. 3). In this paper, we look here at their ideological contributions one by one. We also try to understand their sources of inspiration and the impact they left.

## 2. Shah Wali Allah

Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (1703–1762) is counted as one of the three leading renewal advocates who are often considered the originators of pan-Islamism, with the other two being the Najdi Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) and the Nigerian Uthman dan Fodio (1755–1816) (Aydin 2017, p. 32). Drawing inspiration from ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Abbas (c. 619–687 CE), the father of Qur’anic interpretation, Wali Allah stated that, in their exegesis of the Torah, the Jews made verbal *tahrif*, interpreting the original verses in an incorrect manner. He accused them of making interpolations, both of language and meaning, omitting some verses and adding others. He called the Jews fiercely bigoted, miserly, and greedy. According to him, the Jews cleverly followed only the principles sanctioned by their own kind rather than those approved by the founders of the Islamic Shari’a. Moreover, he asserted that they interpolated fabricated a *hadith* and offered senseless interpretations of the genuine rules of the Shari’a (Rizvi 1980, p. 238).

## 3. Rahmatullah Kairanwi

Maulana Rahmatullah Kairanwi (1818–1892) of Kairana of the Muzaffarnagar district of modern Uttar Pradesh in India in his famous book *Izhārul Haq* (The Truth Revealed), written in Arabic in 1864 in Istanbul, endorses the view held by Shah Wali Allah, that the Jews falsified the sacred texts. A compilation of a debate between him and Christian missionaries, it aimed to prove the outstanding status of the Qur’an and the *Hadith* on the basis of their historicity and to prove the ahistorical nature of the Bible, the Torah, and other revealed books. Jewish and Christian literature are depicted as lacking scientificity and historicity and are thus downgraded on this basis. In its opening chapter titled “Bible mein Tahreef kei Dallael” (Evidence of Changes in the Bible), he mentions two types of changes: The first is a change of words, which is the addition of new words and the replacement of one word with another. The second is a change of meaning, which is the presentation of a variety of interpretations that deflect attention from the real meaning of the words (Alavi 2015, p. 169).

#### 4. The Genesis of Islamism in the Colonial Experience

The colonial experience profoundly shaped nineteenth-century Islamic political thought. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in particular, when Islam “seemed to fall on evil days” as a result of the European colonization of the heartlands of the Muslim world, Muslims were told everywhere, from Morocco to Indonesia, to draw inspiration from the glorious Islamic past to form their identity and to unite. This ideology found expression in the adventurist and revivalist movements led by Mohammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703–1792) in Arabia; Syed Ahmad Barelvi (1786–1831) in India; Mohammad Ali ibn al-Sanusi (1787–1859), the founder of the Sanusiyyah Order in Libya; Usman dan Fodio (1754–1817) in Nigeria; and Mohammad Ahmad (1848–1885), the Mahdi of Sudan. All of them re-emphasized the requirement of political action for the socio-moral revival of Islamic society. By political action they implied an activism epitomized by *jihad*. They believed that Muslims should strive to realize God’s will through moral self-discipline and should not hesitate, indulging in military combat or warfare if required. On another level, they provided defense to Islam from the polemical and hostile attacks of nineteenth-century Western orientalisks and tried to protect it from the intellectual and moral imperialism of the West, as they saw it. They put stress on the original message of Islam, in which, according to them, the eternally valid ideal pattern for traditional Muslim society could be found. They also emphasized that Muslims are fully equipped to respond to the political, cultural, and scientific challenges of the West (Hasan 1986, p. 1074). This happened more so in British India than anywhere else. The traditionalist school of Deoband considers itself to be a direct successor of Shah Wali Allah. Another movement, which is even more traditionalist, *Ahl-i-Hadith*, traces its genealogy from him, and beyond him from Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi ‘ash-Shahid (killed in 1831) as well as the Yemenite judge (*qādi*) Muhammad b. ‘Ali ash-Shawkani (d. 1832). Three movements emerged in opposition to these two strongly *Hadith*-centered movements mentioned above: the popular and integrationist Barelwiya movement (founded in 1885), Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh, and the Nadwāt al-Ulamā in Lucknow (founded in 1893). However, antisemitism was not absent in these three movements, nor in the other movements that developed in the twentieth century—a prominent example being Jama’at-i Islami, founded in 1941 by Sayyid Abul-A’la Mawdudi (1903–1979) (Hartung 2001, p. 190).

The Islamists presented the agenda of de-Westernization as a quest to establish *Hakimiyyat Allah* (‘God’s rule’), replacing democracy with this new totalitarianism. ‘Jews and crusaders as evil-doers’ are particularly targeted by this so called ‘liberation theology’ (Nasr 1996, p. 148). The Islamists see their campaign against globalization and their uprising against Western imperialism as a revolt against ‘world Jewry’ (Tibi 2012a, p. 148).

#### 5. Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi

Mawlana Mawdudi (1903–1979), considered as important to Islamism and its antisemitism as Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini (c. 1900–1989) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), addressed the concerns of the intellectually perplexed and politically anxious Muslims of South Asia during the twilight of the British Raj. According to him, the source of the political rise of Hindus and the simultaneous political decline of Muslims lay with the equation between Islam and the colonial culture, which, he argued, had determined the distribution of power in Indian society. This explains why, in spite of being conscious of the apprehension the Muslims had come to have about the ascendancy of the Hindu community, which gave his writings a sense of urgency, he remained focused on liberating Muslims from the colonial influence of the Judeo-Christian West (Nasr 1996, p. 53).

Mawdudi’s rise to prominence, as one who could most effectively stimulate new Muslim political consciousness and express it, was greatly aided by the creation of Pakistan as a distinctive homeland for Indian Muslims at the end of British colonial rule. Assertion of a distinctive Muslim political identity and an assumed divinely mandated political agenda was called for, from the perspective of certain Muslim political activists, as compensation for the loss of the caliphate and the political power of Muslims across the world (Afsaruddin 2007, p. 323).

Mawdudi is considered to be in league with individual thinkers, such as Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (1703–1792), and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), who offered new understandings of the religious texts that challenged the dominant interpretations. However, subsequent thinkers often stretched these new understandings to their logical conclusion in a manner that increased the scope of permissible violence (Wiktorowicz 2005, p. 77).

Mawdudi drew heavily from Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya—the best known medieval Salafi scholar—particularly from his writings on the sovereignty of God. Although there are precedents to Mawdudi’s views in the classical sources, it is safe to say that he arrived at them independently (Nasr 1996, p. 68). Mawdudi expounded the view that the Covenant of Medina brought into existence an alliance between Jews and Muslims just for a particular period of time and that immunity for the Jews and other non-Muslims was revoked once Muhammad conquered Mecca. Mawdudi was the first to stress that *jihad* was imperative for contemporary Muslims. Nobody before him had ever held armed struggle as central to *jihad*, and unlike any major Muslim thinker before him, he was the first to call for a universal *jihad* (Mamdani 2005, pp. 55–56). It is doubtless that Mawdudi is the most influential of the contemporary Islamic revivalist thinkers, influencing revivalism from Morocco to Malaysia, leaving a strong impact on thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb and on events such as the Iranian revolution of 1978–1979. His views and thoughts influenced the spread of Islamic revivalism in Central Asia, North Africa, and Southeast Asia (Nasr 1996, pp. 3–4).

Al Qaeda has its ideological roots in the writings of Mawdudi, among a few others. Mawdudi created the ideological template for the modern Islamic state around the same time as Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mawdudi’s importance for the Egyptian movement lies in his impact on Sayyid Qutb, often seen as the godfather of revolutionary Sunni Islam (he was executed by Nasser in 1966) (Wiktorowicz 2005, pp. 77–79). Mawdudi is considered “second to Qutb among the founding fathers of Islamism, but of much the same calibre”. Mawdudi’s thought was elaborated by Qutb and taken to a more radical conclusion that made a clear distinction between modernity and Westernization. It called for an embrace of modernity but a rejection of Westernization (Mamdani 2005, pp. 55–56). A more direct connection came to exist through one of Mawdudi’s most important protégés, Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadwi (1914–1999), a central figure in the dissemination of Mawdudi’s theories across the Arab world. In August 1940, Mawdudi had requested that Nadwi, an Arabist at the Nadwātu’l-Ulamā of Lucknow, translate his writings on *iqamat-i din* for the benefit of the Arab world (Nasr 1996, p. 40). Mawdudi’s theory of modern *jahiliyya* was popularized by Nadwi through his Arabic publication *What Did the World Lose Due to the Decline of Islam?* (1950). The very next year after its publication, Nadwi traveled to the Middle East for the first time, where he met Qutb, who had already read his book. Qutb’s *In the Shade of the Qur’an* (1953), contains lengthy quotations from both Mawdudi and Nadwi (Wiktorowicz 2005, pp. 77–79). Robert Wistrich found the writings of Qutb, especially his essay “Our Struggle with the Jews”, which was first published in the early 1950s, to be a good example of the synthesis of polemics in the ancient Islamic sources and Western antisemitism, produced to demonstrate to Muslims that Zionism was a Satanic evil that they had to combat. In this essay, Qutb presents Jews as “a metaphor and symbol for the danger of Western domination and immorality, as well as a continuing threat in their own right to the integrity of Islam which they compulsively seek to destroy” (Wistrich 1991, p. 225). Hence, according to the Islamist ideology of Qutb, it is incumbent on Muslims to die in a “cosmic” war against the Jews, and Muslims have no choice in this regard, because they have been under attack from the Jews since the birth of Islam (Tibi 2013, p. 31). Hannah Arendt clearly differentiates between traditional Judeophobia, which is a type of evil, and antisemitism—a greater evil that endorses genocide. She argues that antisemitism is not merely the hatred of Jews, but it is genocidal in nature, because it projects the Jews as an “evil” that must be eradicated (Tibi 2012b, p. 54). Tibi believes that this “distinction between Judeophobia and antisemitism is pertinent to the study of the place of Jews in Islam” (Tibi 2012b, p. 54). Qutb was certainly under Mawdudi’s strong influence when he wrote this essay, considering how Mawdudi interpreted the Qur’an as illustrated by his commentary on chapter 3 (*Al Imran*), verse 112. According to Mawdudi, if the Jews had ever

enjoyed any measure of peace and security anywhere in the world, it was not due to their own might but because of the goodwill and benevolence of others. They had either been granted asylum by Muslim states or extended protection by non-Muslim powers, which had enabled them to live in peace whenever they could in the past. The state of Israel came into existence only because of the support it received from the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and the Soviet Union (USSR), and just as in the past, when the Jews emerged as a power, "it was due not to their intrinsic strength but to the strength of others" (Mawdudi 2012, p. 86). In his commentary on chapter 62 (*Al Jumu'ah*), verse 6 of the Qur'an, Mawdudi frowns upon the Jewish love for life and juxtaposes it with the Muslim love for martyrdom. He believed that the Muslims prevailed upon the Jews of Arabia, their equal with respect to numbers and strength and far more resourceful, only because, instead of being afraid of dying, the Muslims yearned to lay down their lives for the cause of God. In sharp contrast to them, the Jews were only concerned with the continuity of their existence, irrespective of their quality of life. They were not fully committed to any cause, neither that of God nor that of their nation. They were not ready to die fighting for any cause or for their honor or property or life. Their excessive love for life had turned them into cowards (Mawdudi 2012, p. 854).

Mawdudi aspired to transform society as a whole through centralized revolutionary leadership based on the Leninist model. Islam was explicitly defined by him as a universalist *jihad* for the welfare of humanity. He took the Prophet Muhammad as his charismatic model of a revolutionary leader. The seizure of power by a vanguard Islamic party was essential, according to Mawdudi, for the implementation of a world revolution that transcended any national boundaries as envisaged by Islam. The mobilization of the masses by the Islamist revolutionary elite was considered necessary by Mawdudi for achieving their aims. It is a lesson that was thoroughly absorbed by the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. In his own ideology, Khomeini drew his inspiration not only from Mawdudi but also from the Iranian Islamo-Marxist Ali Shariati (1933–1977), the leading theoretician of "Red Shiaism" (Wistrich 2013, p. 406). Shariati was a direct legatee of the Indian poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) as far as the notion of the "self" was concerned. This was in spite of the fact that they never met, for Shariati was just five years old when Iqbal, who was reverentially called Allama, died. He politicized the notion of *khudi* (self), Iqbal's legacy, with his own emphasis on the notion of *khud-āgahi* (self-awareness) and built upon it his own idea of *khistān* (return to the self) (Chatterjee 2011, p. 172). Pakistani columnists regularly cite Iqbal, for his anti-Jewish statements and couplets such as, "the veins and life of the English (people) are in the clutches of Jews". It is done with the aim of strengthening antisemitism (Ahmad 2013). Iqbal is revered as the ideological father of Pakistan.

An important protégé of Mawdudi was Maryam Jameelah nee Margaret Marcus (1934–2012), an American Jewish convert to Islam, who settled in Pakistan in her youth, married a Pakistani, and had children with him. She published all her books in Pakistan, where she lived for the rest of her life. Her influence far exceeds that of Jama'at-i-Islami when it comes to articulation of an "internally consistent paradigm" for Islamic "revivalism's rejection of the West". In this respect, she played an important role in the spread of revivalist thought across the world. She writes:

God tells us in Holy Qur'an that for the sake of nationalism and racist pride, the Jews were guilty of the unpardonable sin of deliberately distorting their scriptures and interpolations and false interpretations and persecuting every prophet who was sent to redeem them. When the Jews of Medina rejected the mission of our Holy Prophet with an intense vehemence because they could not accept as their religious guide an unlettered Arab, the Holy Qur'an warns us that together with the idolaters, they will always be the fiercest and most treacherous of all our enemies. Holy Qur'an then curses them with exile, persecution and every kind of wretchedness until Resurrection Day when the disbelievers among them will be condemned to eternal punishment in Hell! Holy Qur'an furthermore warns (5: 51) that Muslims must not take the Jews or Christians for friends; they are the friends of each other and that whoever takes them for a friend has become one of them! God has punished the Muslims today



(particularly in Zionist-occupied Palestine) with one calamity after another for shamelessly flouting this crucial injunction! (Jameelah 1983, p. 16)

She also writes: "It was the wife of a slain Jewish warrior of Khaybar who put poison into the food of the Holy Prophet which caused the illness eventually resulting in his death (*Ibid.*)".

## 6. Syed Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadwi

Another protégé of Mawdudi, Syed Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadwi (1913–1999), mentioned above, who also served as the rector of the Darul Ulūm Nadwātu'l-'Ulamā, a highly prestigious institution of Islamic theological studies in Lucknow, came to enjoy the position of the founding chairman of the trustees of the highly prestigious Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. His writings are full of antisemitic rhetoric. According to him, exposure to "injustice, oppression, chastisement, extradition, troubles, hardships" and domination by other nations is the destiny of Jews. A typical racial character had emerged in them because of "political serfdom, oppression and anguish suffered indefinitely". They were globally infamous for being excessively proud of their genealogy. While they were "meek and submissive in distress, they were tyrannical and mean when they had the upper hand". "Hypocrisy, deceit, treachery, selfishness, cruelty and usuriousness" had become integral to their nature (Nadwi n.d., pp. 22–23). Nadwi points out how the Qur'an repeatedly refers to "the extent to which they had sunk into degradation in the sixth and the seventh centuries". The Jewish heritage, according to Nadwi, was primarily composed of "intrigue and crime, violence and high-handed tactics", "their inborn tendencies which could clearly be discerned at any time or place where they have happened to reside, like a pivot on which their entire intelligence and endeavours have always revolved for the satisfaction of their ulterior motives". "Every insurrection and revolution, conspiracy and intrigue, lawlessness and anarchy" had been the brainchild of the Jews. They had triggered "every movement designed to foment social, political, economic and moral disintegration of the non-Jewish people". The characteristics of Jews, according to Nadwi, were exultingly summed up by an eminent Jew, Dr. Oscar Levy, who described them as "the rulers of the world; mischief mongers who foment every trouble and turmoil, wherever it might be" (Nadwi 1967, pp. 8–9). He did not even spare the non-proselytizing nature of Judaism. He believed that the Jews have failed to give any message of salvation for humanity. The reason for this, Nadwi explains, is that, according to the Jews, salvation is determined by birth, irrespective of one's belief or action. This notion of the superiority of the Jewish race "signally incompatible with the spirit of any universal message of brotherhood and equality of mankind. . . . Such an idea, naturally, delimits even the scope of divine guidance and salvation and places restriction on its dissemination beyond the closed circle of one's blood kin" (*Ibid.*, pp. 9–10). This, according to Nadwi also explains why Judaism can never become a universal religion and why it remains a non-proselytizing faith. He adds:

The logical result of such an attitude was that the Jews should discriminate against other nations and evolve such norms of virtue and vice, right and wrong, which should make allowance for the superiority of one race over the other. And, then, nothing more is required to justify and persist in the cruelest (sic) injustice against the non-Jewish people. The holy Qur'an alludes to this very attitude of the Jews when it says: "That is because they say: We have no duty to the Gentiles. (*Ibid.*)

According to Maulana Saeed-ur-Rahman, the current rector of Nadwātu'l-'Ulamā, the advent of Islam rendered Judaism and Christianity obsolete, because Islam covered all their teachings. "Therefore, we invite Jews to join our ranks as Muslims. . . . Qur'an mentions as to how they falsified the sacred texts" (Saeed-ur-Rahman 2011).

## 7. Israr Ahmad

The internet and television have enabled ideologues who are alumni of Islamist seminaries and associated with prominent Islamist movements to reach the South Asian Muslim diaspora across the



world, as illustrated by the case of Israr Ahmed (1932–2010), a prominent Islamic theologian. He joined Jama'at-i-Islami in 1950 but left it when its leader Mawdudi decided to participate in electoral politics in 1957, which according to him was incompatible with the revolutionary ideology of the Jama'at as adopted in the pre-1947 period. Pakistan conferred its third highest civilian award, *Sitara-i-Imtiaz* (Star of Excellence), upon him in 1981. He regularly appeared on Peace TV, which was banned in India and Bangladesh in 2016.

In a YouTube video dedicated to Israr Ahmad's references to Jews in his discourses, the show's host mentions that Israr Ahmad called the Jews the agents of *Iblis* (the arch-devil in Islam). Following this, a discourse by Israr Ahmad is broadcast in which he calls the Jews "agents of Satan among both, djines and human beings". He says that the Jews have been the most prominent among those agents for the last fourteen centuries. He explains this by saying that the Jews became extremely jealous of Muhammad when he became a prophet. The Jews believed that they had a proprietary right to prophethood, as for 2000 years prophets had only been Jewish. Since then, the Jews have been the biggest agents of Satan. "And for about four or five hundred years Christians have been agents of all Jews. Although the Jews were persecuted by Christians for a long time in history yet the Jews gradually managed to gain control of them just as one tames a horse" (Khilafat Forum 2014). They look down upon non-Jews and believe they can and should be used for the benefit of Jews, just as animals are domesticated, horses for transportation, bulls for ploughing fields—all for the benefit of humanity. Thus, the Jews are enemies of all of mankind. "They believe no matter what they do, God is never going to question them for any of their misdeeds, for they are His chosen people" (*Ibid.*). Then, show's host reappears to point out that it has been four years since Israr Ahmad passed away. He draws attention to the fact that Israr Ahmad told us that there is a prophecy that the Jews are cursed to be killed in large numbers at the hands of Muslims before the apocalypse. Then, Israr Ahmad's discourse is played in which he blames the Jews for trying their best to kill Jesus. He says that Jesus will return to ensure that not a single Jew survives. Then, he goes on to talk about how he was labelled an anti-Semite when he said this in America and how, in response, there was a call to boycott his books and website. In his rebuttal, he points out that the editor of *The Trumpet*, a journal of Christian Zionists, himself has written that "eighty per cent of the Jews will be killed and the remaining twenty per cent would be those who will accept Jesus as their lord" (*Ibid.*). The show host appears again on the screen to introduce the next discourse of Israr Ahmad by pointing out how Israr Ahmad used to explain the complete agenda of Jews:

Until some time ago they used to say that they were not against Islam the faith, but only against political Islam. But now they have started saying that the root of all evil is Islam, the religion, itself. Now their writers and their benefactors have started saying that the Qur'an in itself, Islam in itself, Muhammad himself is evil. So it is a war against Islam and Muslims. (*Ibid.*)

He adds that he is absolutely sure that the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon was the handiwork of Israel, for he believes nobody else was capable of executing it. Israel's agents are omnipresent in America. Both print and electronic media are in their control (*Ibid.*). He uses the terms Israelis and Jews interchangeably, which is not uncommon in the South Asian Muslim discourse. Although the video has been viewed by only 294,934 people since it was published on YouTube on 28 July 2014, the number of people who saw it on television when it was broadcast was much greater, as is the case with most such videos published on the internet. A far greater number of people in South Asia watch television than have access to the internet.

## 8. Zakir Naik

Peace TV, on which Israr Ahmad used to appear regularly until his death in 2010, is owned by Islamic televangelist Zakir Naik, whose "underlying message about Jews can be summed up as follows: Jews are the most powerful group of people in the world—and the Qur'an warns that they

are Muslims' 'staunchest enemies','' as pointed out by Shehnaz Haqqani. According to Haqqani, Naik was deeply influenced by Ahmad Deedat (d. 2005), a South African Muslim televangelist of Indian origin, whose organization Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI) is said to have been heavily funded by the Bin Laden family. He only had praises for Osama Bin Laden, whom he is said to have met in person (Haqqani 2016).

### 9. Hafiz Muhammad Saeed

Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba and the current leader of its successor organization, Jama'at-ud-Dawa, published a commentary in Urdu on Surah at-Taubah, which is widely believed to be one of the last chapters of the Qur'an to be revealed: *Tafseer Surah at-Taubah* (2006). The book was compiled from the lectures he gave at the Lashkar-e-Taiba summer 2004 training camp. It was translated into English just two or three years later by his organization's in-house press Dar-ul-Andlus (White 2015, p. 57). In the book, he identifies four categories of people: (1) infidels and polytheists (2) Jews and Christians (3) the true believers, and (4) the hypocrites (*munāfiqīn*). Surprisingly, Jews and Christians, who fall in the second category, are criticized more severely than those who belong to the first category. It explains that there is no doubt that the people of the scriptures (Jews and Christians) had "mutilated the Shariah" and "devoured others' wealth and property as a right," and that these activities were continuing "even today" (White 2015). Mutilation of the Shariah implies falsification of scriptures. In this particular commentary, Jews and Christians are depicted as the preeminent threat to the Muslim community. Saeed interprets 9:29 as Allah's order to the believers to continue killing the people of the scripture, *Ahl-e-Kitab*. Such killing is not considered unreasonable and unlawful (White 2015).

### 10. Pirzada Muhammad Raza Saqib Mustafai

In another antisemitic video that appeared on YouTube in June of 2012, Pakistani cleric Pirzada Muhammad Raza Saqib Mustafai argued that a prerequisite for world peace was the total annihilation of the Jews. In the video titled "*Yahodi Islam Kay Aur Aman Kay Asal Dushman Hain*" (Jews Are the Real Enemy of Islam and Peace), Muhammad Raza Saqib Mustafai states the following: "And all the troubles that exist around the world are because of the Jews. When the Jews are wiped out, then the world would be purified and the sun of peace would begin to rise on the entire world". He delivered the speech as part of the *Fikr-é-Īmān* (Concern for Faith) series of lectures (Peerzada Raza Saqib Mustafai 2012).

Mustafai is a prominent cleric belonging to the Barelvi School of Sunni Islam and is also the founder of Idarat-ul-Mustafa Pakistan, which is described as a spiritual movement for the enforcement of Islamic shari'a in Pakistan. He is a cleric at the Markazi Jamia Masjid Gulzar-e-Madinah, Gujranwala, Pakistan. He said the following in a speech:

And a time is about to come when Allah would bestow such a success on Islam that there would not be a single Jew left on the face of the earth. Hazrat Eisa [Jesus] would come; the warriors of Imam Mahdi [according to Islamic traditions he is the last Imam] would march into the battlefield; the pig would be killed and the symbol of cross would be broken. And it has been described in the books of *Hadith* [sayings of Prophet Muhammad] that Allah would provide such aid to the followers of Islam that if a Jew would be hiding behind a tree branch or a stone, then that stone would call out for the Muslim *mujahid* [to come] towards it and would tell him that a Jew is hiding behind me. And when the last Jew will be killed from this world, then peace would be established in the world—so much so that snakes would roam among people but would not bite. Wolves and goats would drink water from the same quayside and goats would not have any fear from wolves. It is the guarantee of world peace when the last Jew is slain. As long as there are Jews in this world, peace cannot be established in the whole world. Muslims are being called terrorists, as the cause of the destruction of world peace; but it is not the reality; Muslims are fighting the war of their survival. Muslims are not terrorists; they are the lovers of peace and preachers of peace. And all the troubles

that exist around the world are because of the Jews. When the Jews are wiped out, then the world would be purified and the sun of peace would begin to rise on the entire world (MEMRI 2012).

## 11. Conclusions

Contemporary Islamist Judeophobia has textual roots in the Qur'an and the *Hadith* (Webman 2017, p. 161). According to Reuven Firestone, "a latent anti-Judaism or antisemitism is embedded in the Qur'an, as in the New Testament" (Firestone 2007, p. 249). However, it is noteworthy that, until the modern era, Jews lacked the "demonic qualities attributed to them in patristic and medieval Christian literature" (Stillman 2010, p. 214). One does not find obsessive emotional hatred in the negative representation of the Jews in Islamic sources. The polemic against the Jews and the Children of Israel in the Qur'an, explains London-based Palestinian scholar Suha Taji-Faruki, "serves as a basis for the negative reconstruction of the Jewish character" and provides "an explanation for the Zionist successes, the offense in Palestine, and the political and economic domination in other parts of the world" (Taji-Farouki 1998, p. 15). New studies and religious verdicts constantly reinforce such polemics (Webman 2017).

Most Muslims in South Asia, as in most of the world, except a few countries in the Middle East and North Africa, know the Jews only through secondary sources and not as a result of any direct contact. Their perception of them is largely shaped by the religious-based history they are taught within the confines of their local religious schools and mosques. In modern times, Arab antisemitism, which is a synthesis of Western antisemitism and polemics in Islam, has found its way into South Asia through the South Asian Muslim expatriate population settled there and via seminaries in South Asia financially supported by Salafi regimes in the Middle East. South Asian Muslims have readily absorbed the Arab antisemitic propaganda because of their deference to Arabs on Islam. Islamist Judeophobia fused with genocidal European antisemitism has become part of contemporary Islam because of this (Mansur 2016, p. 72). Bassam Tibi has described the phenomenon as the Islamization of European/Western antisemitism. Some of the ideological roots of Islamist antisemitism lie in South Asia, to which it returned in a far stronger form via the Middle East. All of the above-mentioned South Asian scholars played a crucial role in the rise of Islamism. Antisemitism is an element common to their writings. Some of the recurring themes are the following:

- (1) Jewish antagonism towards Islam since its advent;
- (2) The depiction of racism, jealousy, stubbornness, arrogance, treason, and deceit as traits of Jewish character;
- (3) The accusation of the falsification of sacred texts.

The impact of their writings was felt far and wide. Mawdudi inspired both, Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Nadwi played a pivotal role in spreading Mawdudi's ideology across the Arab world. Video recordings of Israr Ahmad's discourses continue to reach millions of Muslim homes globally everyday through television broadcasts and the internet. Ali Shariati, a source of ideological inspiration for the Islamic Revolution in Iran, was influenced by Iqbal's philosophy.

It would be utopian to think that there will ever be a complete end to Muslim antisemitism or even a declaration from Muslims along the lines of *Nostra Aetate*, as Mehnaz Afridi points out:

The Qur'an represents itself as a universal teaching; hence its rhetorical style appears to refer negatively to Jews in general terms. Since for Muslim believers the Qur'an is inimitable scripture (the inimitability of the Qur'an is an absolute dogma of Islamic theology), the negative portrayal of Jews represents a level of truth that is extremely difficult to question. As scripture, the Qur'an is a powerful foundation for the worldview of Muslims around the globe. The kind of intercommunal conflicts we witness today may be only a few years old, but the verses of scripture have an eternal quality to them. (Afridi 2015, pp. 346–56)

Afridi admits that “it is a challenge to teach scripture that at certain points discusses mistrusting and/or killing Jews” (Afridi 2017, p. 150). She adds that “Interpretation of such verses by extremists” has “challenged” her own “thinking about sacred text and how to receive revelation as a Muslim” (Ibid.). For her, “the approach cannot be literal, but has to be contextual and encompass the many positive meanings that the religion upholds to procure understanding from a humanitarian point of view” (Ibid.).

No matter how dismal it may seem, scholars such as Mehnaz Afridi give us reasons to be optimistic, provided we do not cease to confront extremist interpretations of scriptures and try to avoid literal interpretation of polemics wherever possible. South Asian Muslim attitudes toward Jews can be broadly classified as indifferent, hostile, and amiable. Almost all synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in South Asia are looked after by Muslims because of the Jewish exodus from there following the creation of the modern state of Israel. Most of the students in the Jewish-owned schools in Kolkata and Mumbai are Muslim. Jews in India, except those belonging to the Judaizing movements, generally live in Muslim areas with their Muslim neighbors in a peaceful and conflict-free environment. Even the Arab–Israeli conflict has failed to dent the cordiality of their relations. However, Muslims who know Jews only through secondary sources and not as a result of any direct contact, as is the case with most South Asian Muslims because of the small number of Jews there, are susceptible to Islamist antisemitic propaganda. Since the November 2008 attack on the Chabad House in Mumbai, the security of the synagogues in Mumbai has been tightened, which has, in turn, made the boundaries between the Jews of European and Indian descent even more prominent. Some sections of Indian Jewry are keen to dissociate themselves from “white”, Western Jews—and their security concerns—which, these Indian Jews feel, are intimidating to their Muslim neighbors, and add to the visibility of their perceived connection with the state of Israel. However, Egorova is careful to point out that it may not be prudent to think of any perceived threat from local Muslims as baseless, for a plot by alleged agents of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba to attack Americans in Hyderabad and Jewish families in Guntur was uncovered in 2004, four years prior to the attack on the Chabad-Lubawich Center in Mumbai (Egorova 2018, p. 46). “The ignorance about Judaism and Jewish history is, of course, a particularly fertile breeding-ground for antisemitism . . .”, as Robert Wistrich cautioned us (Wistrich 1991, p. 166). The remedy to the menace of antisemitism lies in education and in an educational revolution. The study of Jewish history should be part of the curriculum at the secondary level of education, and Islamic seminaries should certainly take stock of how the Jews are presented to their students. Sadly, little has been done in this direction.

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