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ABSTRACT: This article discusses Islamophobia and its relationship with antisemitism in the context of the radical European right’s recent shift towards pro-Israel positions and away from its traditional antisemitism. Whereas this shift also has US and Australian manifestations, this article suggests that current Islamophobic utterances can be seen as surrogate antisemitism.

Key words: Islamophobia, antisemitism, Zionism, settler colonialism

Islamophobia and antisemitism are related—there is by now a substantial comparative literature dedicated to their relationship. Some scholars appraise the two phobias in a register of similarity, or with a combination of both similarity and difference. Celebrated historian Enzo Traverso, who wrote extensively about antisemitism, recently appraised them in a comparative vein. Similarly, introducing a special issue of Ethnic and Racial Studies dedicated to the two phobias Nasar Meer argued in 2013 for “harnessing the explanatory power of long-established organizing concepts within the study of race and racism”. The topic also features prominently in public discourse, and London Mayor Sadiq Khan, for example, has recently adopted a comparative approach. Alternatively, scholars and commentators have emphasized difference. In these instances, comparisons between the two prejudices are foreclosed.

The former interpretative structure is typically mobilized to denounce both prejudices; the latter is either mobilized to emphasize different historical contingencies, something the comparativists would not disagree with, or to state or imply that one form of stigmatization is more acceptable than the other, or even that one is acceptable while the other is not, something the comparativists would definitely disagree with. Either way, whether they are deemed comparable or not, the question of their reciprocal relation emerges.

This article explores current mobilizations of these phobias and develops three arguments: the first section observes how often one is embraced as the other is dismissed; the second section reflects on the ways in which these phobias are understood as place-specific; while the third section appraises the imaginative geographies that sustain these phobias. This latter argument focuses on the foundational role colonial and settler colonial imaginaries play in their mobilization. It is important that we focus on these imaginaries. Considering the meaning of “phobia,” our collective political health depends on it.

THE QUESTION OF CORRELATION

Many have noted that the two prejudices operate in functionally similar ways. They are both ancient prejudices and each has a complex and distinct multi-century European history. Both antisemitism during the late 19th and early 20th century and Islamophobia in more recent decades grew during times of profound socioeconomic crisis and in the presence of sustained migratory flows. On the basis of this functional similarity, they can and have been
compared. Moreover, both phobias identify an unassimilable alien agency that has entered an imagined national or cultural space and will remain forever alien. They also both rely on similar allegations concerning conspiracies ordained by the “usual suspects” of conspiracy paranoid thought: the “global,” “cosmopolitan,” left-wing elites, a liberal “cabal,” etc. Historic and contemporary examples abound: in 1905 the Protocol of the Elders of Zion alleged a conspiracy to take over the world and establish a “new global order” (that fake news is a new phenomenon is itself fake news). Similarly, contemporary Islamophobes see all Muslims as part of a transnational Ummah (brotherhood) that aims to subvert the whole “Western civilisation.” A widespread story that yokes these hatreds together alleges “the Jews” are deliberately promoting the migration of Muslims to Europe in order to destroy its Christian stability and identity. These racisms typically confuse culture, ethnicity, and religion and both predictably raise the issue of questionable loyalty to national and cultural communities. Islamophobia and antisemitism especially question their targets’ loyalty.

A call for solidarity in the face of parallel hatreds was recently issued by journalists Jonathan Freedland and Mehdi Hasan, who note that both “communities are under attack from far-right white supremacists.” The supremacist narrative is usually constructed, they add, around images of a Muslim invasion, “a wicked plot orchestrated by the same hidden hand behind all malign events through world history: the Jews.” “This is how our haters see us,” Freedland and Hasan continue:

Jews and Muslims connected in a joint enterprise to effect a “white genocide”. It is an unhinged and racist conspiracy theory—and it has both of our communities in its murderous sights. So there can only be one response: Muslims and Jews must stand and fight it together.\footnote{Freedland and Hasan cite a Pew survey of European countries and point out that “these two hatreds are linked on the right,” and “not only in the minds of deranged killers.” The report found that “attitudes toward Jews and Muslims are highly correlated with each other,” and that people “who express negative opinions about Muslims are more likely than others to also express negative views of Jews.” A 2010 Gallup study they also cite found that in the US people “who say they feel ‘a great deal’ of prejudice . . . toward Jews are about 32 times as likely to report feeling ‘a great deal’ of prejudice toward Muslims.” The “kind of people who hate one of us are more likely to hate the other too,” Freedland and Hasan conclude. And yet, while this call should be answered, the relationship between the two hatreds should be clarified, because even though these prejudices have emerged equally from the right and are an expression of related milieus, they are also often adopted selectively and at different times by different individuals and movements. Indeed, if the expression of these hatreds is analyzed in its historical evolution, contrary to the conclusion reached in the report cited by Freedland and Hasan, we can see that the hatreds are often negatively correlated. In time, one hatred goes up (i.e., Islamophobia) as the other goes down (i.e., antisemitism). Many European right-wingers vigorously embraced Islamophobia in recent decades as they abandoned traditionally antisemitic positions. True, they have issued over the years both antisemitic and Islamophobic tropes (which would confirm a correlation), but not at the same time (which indicates a negative correlation).

Only a few embrace both hatreds simultaneously and in non-place-specific ways. Place is indeed a significant feature of these phobias’ global negative articulation, and many (Viktor Orbán of Hungary for example) pursue an antisemitic agenda at home while supporting Israeli policies in the Middle East. Their antisemitism is place-specific, and so is their Islamophobia, which is expressed freely at home but forgotten abroad (the West’s support for Saudi Arabia’s
interventions in Yemen and Syria also comes to mind). A negative correlation, a correlation that coexists with the positive correlation Freedland and Hasan postulate, is confirmed by an analysis that is aware of the imaginative geographies mobilized in these contexts. Thus Islamophobia can be seen as a surrogate for antisemitism—often it spreads when the other recedes, and it applies to locales where the other does not apply.

A number of Jewish intellectuals and controversialists have even publicly supported Islamophobic sensitivities as they warned against resurgent antisemitism. Bat Ye’or, for example, the originator of the idea of “Eurabia”—a crucial idea in Islamophobic thinking—has “traced” a “secret” recent history of Europe. In her reconstruction, which is a fully fledged conspiracy theory, the Euro-Arab Dialogue initiated in the 1970s turned from an intergovernmental discussion group into a vehicle for “Islamisation.” It is an entirely fictional proposition, Israeli historian Robert Wistrich has insightfully called Ye’or’s conspiracy “the protocols of the elders of Brussels,” but the conspiracy has in some ways gone mainstream, something conspiracy theories rarely do. Likewise, Alain Finkielkraut even praised Renaud Camus as a “great writer.” Camus coined the notion of the “Great Replacement”—an alleged conspiracy ordained by cosmopolitan capital and the anti-racist left, and another crucial concept in Islamophobic discourse.

Camus has espoused both prejudices in his career, but did so at different times. In his writings, an original antisemitism turned eventually into Islamophobia. His journey has been replicated by many who have expressed their anxious concerns for the sociocultural and civilizational integrity of their imagined polities vis-à-vis immigrants, and specifically Muslim immigrants. Camus is French, but in the United States, Islamophobic tropes are also routinely mobilized to argue against antisemitism. What appears at first as a correlation linking the two hatreds at times turns out to be a negative correlation mediated by anxieties about place.

WHERE IS THE ISLAMOPHOBIC/ANTISEMITIC SELF?

The imbrication of two phobias is a global phenomenon that has political, institutional, individual, and media-facilitated manifestations. A glaring example of place-specific antisemitism in negative correlation with Islamophobia emerged in the US summer of 2019, when US President Donald Trump provoked outcry by racially attacking four Democratic congresswomen and suggesting they should “return” where they came from. As well as daydreaming about actually deporting them, he also wished for them to move away from the imagined place he imagined sharing with his supporters. The following month, at the request of his administration, Israel denied two of them (Democratic Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar) entry into the country. Responding to further outcry, Trump argued: “Where has the Democratic Party gone?” He then added: “Where have they gone where they are defending these two people [representatives Tlaib and Omar] over the state of Israel? And I think any Jewish people that vote for a Democrat, I think it shows either a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty.” This was a remarkably antisemitic remark, as the possibility of questionable loyalty is a classic antisemitic trope whether two polities are imagined as potentially opposed, and whether the two polities are deemed to be intimately aligned in the struggle against their enemies. Trump then reiterated his point the following day. He felt that the Democratic Party in its entirety had moved away from the imaginary place he was dwelling in.

Antisemitism is classically driven by anxious concerns about place, and Trump’s antisemitism fits in with this pattern. His use of “where” in the remarks cited above, a relative clause repeated three times in two lines, is indeed telling. In his framing, difference with his
opinion spatially distances those who disagree with him (when he asks rhetorically “where has the Democratic Party gone?” he is signalling that he perceives it to be located away from his subject position). And yet, somewhat ironically, whereas he had previously argued that four Democratic congresswomen should return “where” they are from (Tlaib, one of the women he attacked, is Palestinian-American), she was literally unable to even visit the place she is from at his own request (of course she is from Michigan too). The Democratic Party is perceived as distant, but these women are perceived to be in a proximate position, and this prompted his discomfort. Hence, Trump demanded that they “return” wherever they once were and move away from him. It is a worrying psychologic framework, suggesting a politics fundamentally shaped by a peculiar psychological geography. Trump’s antisemitic and Islamophobic utterances were crucially space-specific. While identification with Israel displaces the self in a way that turns an original desire to send the women “back where they are from” into a determination to keep them where they are, the Democratic Party has not followed him to an imaginary place where Israel and the US occupy the same location. Not following him to this imaginary location is perceived as a betrayal.

A paranoid desire to control everyone’s movement follows—walls keep people out and in this instance of displaced Islamophobia imaginary walls can be used to keep people in (Tlaib and Omar are the two members of “the squad” to whom Islamophobia specifically applies). A sitting US president hurling racist insult at members of Congress is not unprecedented, but a sitting president effectively tampering with the ability of elected representatives to travel abroad is. This point was not prominent in the outflow of indignation that briefly followed Trump’s utterances. In this instance race trumped attention to place. Then again, Trump’s imaginative geography is peculiar but also not entirely unprecedented, and in a sense he belongs to a venerable and long-lasting political tradition. In the 19th century British and American philosemites, for example, were also and simultaneously profoundly antisemitic. To articulate their place-specific antisemitism, they advocated for the establishment of a Jewish colony in Palestine, a place where the “Jews” could “go back where they were from.” The “colony” would come, the *Yishuv* (which in Hebrew means “colony”). But it wasn’t just a colony; it was a *settler* colony. Then the *Yishuv* would become Israel, a settler society, but the imaginative geographies sustained by place-specific antisemitism via settler colonialism did not substantially change.

The link between settler colonialism and Jewish emancipation was recently explored by Ben Ratskoff, who highlighted Marx’s “attention to the ‘free states of North America’” in his 1844 *On the Jewish Question*, and Marx’s intuition that only in the United States (as opposed to both France and Germany) could Jewish emancipation be complete. While Ratskoff dismantles “assumptions that antisemitism and white supremacy are necessarily isomorphic,” he also remarks that “Trump’s paradoxical proximity both to Jewish advisors, allies, and immediate family members and to antisemitic white nationalist movements confounds.” Ratskoff focuses on “public debate around Jewish whiteness,” but this proximity does not confound if settler colonialism as a specific mode of domination and the imaginative geographies it engenders are taken into consideration. Jews are emancipated in the settler colony (as Marx realized they would) because, as Matthew Frye Jacobson remarked about US history (a point Ratskoff quotes), in practice, “what a citizen really was, at bottom, was someone who could help put down a slave rebellion or participate in Indian wars.” Likewise, a “Judeo-Christian white” in the US today is someone who could help put down an intifada or an urban riot.

The turning point in these transitions from antisemitism to Islamophobia is support for Zionism and for the Israeli policies towards Palestinians under occupation. It is significant that both Zionism and Islamophobia developed historically in a global context dealing with
the contradictions of a specific diaspora’s impossible national location. In the 19th century and during the 20th century’s first half it was the “Jewish question” and Zionism, during the second half of the 20th century and today it is the “Palestinian question” and Islamophobia (even though Palestinians, of course, are not all Muslims). For many right-wingers, the journey away from antisemitism and towards Islamophobia transits through an embrace of Zionism. Zionism itself was (as well as a national movement) a journey away from antisemitism. For those who are now embracing Islamophobia and place-specific antisemitism it is a metaphorical journey, for the Zionists who went to Palestine it was a literal one.

THE COLONIALISM/ZIONISM NEXUS

Traverso supports a comparative analysis of the two prejudice systems. He points out that today “racism has changed its forms and its targets,” that racialism, “a scientific discourse based on biological theories,” has now “given way for a cultural prejudice that emphasises a radical anthropological discrepancy between ‘Jewish-Christian’ Europe and Islam,” and that “the Muslim immigrant has replaced the Jew” in racist discourse. Traverso understands Islamophobia and antisemitism as functionally related:

Anti-Semitism played the role of a “cultural code” that allowed Germans to negatively define a national consciousness, in a country troubled by rapid modernisation and the Jewish concentration in the big cities, where they appeared as its most dynamic group. In other words, a German was first of all a non-Jew. In a similar way, today Islam is becoming a cultural code that allows one to find, by a negative demarcation, a lost “French identity”, threatened or engulfed in the process of globalisation.

However, he also detects a crucial distinction separating the two: colonialism. Traverso’s comparative analysis in a register of similarity then turns comparative in a register of difference. “Islamophobia is not a simple ersatz for the old anti-Semitism,” he remarks, because its roots are old and it possesses its own tradition: colonialism. The roots of Islamophobia lie in the memory of the long colonial past of Europe and, in France, of the Algerian War. Colonialism formed a political anthropology based on the dichotomy between citizens and colonial subjects—citoyens and indigènes—that fixed social, spatial, racial and political boundaries [emphasis in original].

And yet, colonialism and antisemitism are also crucially interwoven: Zionism, a most colonial enterprise since its inception (and today), was also and crucially a response to antisemitism. It may not be a “simple ersatz,” but colonial traditions do not render Islamophobia and antisemitism distinct hatreds—quite the opposite. If Zionism as a settler-colonial movement is added to the picture, and Traverso does not add it to the picture, the register remains one of similarity. Moreover, the political anthropology of Zionism and that of colonialism overlap, are often undistinguishable, and the “social, spatial, racial and political boundaries” separating Jews and Palestinians historically (and in contemporary Israel and the Occupied Territories) are as fixed as those of other colonial traditions. Colonialism shapes Zionism as much as Islamophobia is shaped by it, and keeping this shared genealogy in mind can help explain why so many European right-wingers could seamlessly transit from antisemitism to Islamophobia.
Leader of the French National Rally Marine Le Pen epitomizes this transition: in 2017 she proactively distanced her political movement from traditional antisemitic positions as she became a vocal supporter of Israeli policies vis-à-vis the Palestinian population under occupation.\textsuperscript{30} She could draw on a deeply entrenched and widespread archive of colonial structures of feeling.\textsuperscript{31} Similarly, leader of Italy’s right Matteo Salvini distinguished between the two hatreds in early 2020 (he is an expert in both). When asked about the resurgence of antisemitism he responded that in his opinion antisemitism was “due to the growth in recent years of Islamic extremism and fanaticism,” and that the “massive presence of immigrants from Muslim countries contributes to the spread of anti-Semitism in Italy” (he then proclaimed that should he become Prime Minister he would recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital).\textsuperscript{32} Place-specific antisemitism in a negative correlation with Islamophobia is clearly recognizable in his utterances. In a fundamental respect, however, these ideological travelers are being consistent: they consistently adopt a colonial worldview as they perceive a hardening global “line” separating colonizer and colonized. They actually do not travel that much.

A further element informing these right-wingers’ transition from antisemitism to Islamophobia should be considered: as the hardening global line they are drawing is underpinned by an imaginary geography that is obsessed with immigrants and their resettlements, they are conceptually differentiating between settler-colonizers and settler-colonized. This distinction is not underpinned generally by a colonial worldview. It is premised specifically on a settler-colonial worldview. If “Europe” is constituted by the colonial relation and the contemporary settler societies are one great result of a process of “Great Replacement,” as these right wingers see Europe becoming engulfed by a putative process of “great replacement,” they think of the settlers. The settler colonizers, after all, win by greatly replacing, and in the settler societies, including Israel, demographic replacement is a well-recorded process of national achievement and official policy, not a conspiracy theory.\textsuperscript{33} Paranoiac concerns about demography thus take two complementary and mutually reinforcing shapes: anxiety about the possibility of a “Great Replacement” being inflicted against one’s fantasized polity on the one hand (that is, anxieties prompting Islamophobia in one place), and empathetic identification with an actual project of great replacement that is inflicted on a collective that is construed as intractably “other” (that is, an identification that prompts support for Islamophobic settler colonialism in Palestine).\textsuperscript{34}

For these right-wingers, including, for example, the Australian mass murderer who went on a killing rampage in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019, a “Great Replacement” is only a concern if one thinks he is on the wrong side of it.\textsuperscript{35} The Christchurch murderer was an Australian settler nationalist; he had radicalized while traveling through Europe, a traditional rite of passage for young Australians facing adult life. That he could express his settler nationalism in this way while in another settler country is testament to the complexities of a transnational settler-colonial mentality. Australia is indeed another locale where a settler-colonial history interacts with an Islamophobic present. It has become a veritable laboratory of global Islamophobic practices (Islamophobia is certainly not new in Australia—historical anxieties surrounding the presence of “Afghans” in its center, and the foundational mythology of Anzac and Gallipoli are two constitutive moments in this history).\textsuperscript{36} Islamophobia in Australia has been crucial to a comprehensive political realignment since the early 2000s, a key ideological ingredient in the official discontinuation of multiculturalism and the implementation of what Scott Poynting and Victoria Mason have called the “new integrationism.”\textsuperscript{37} Multiculturalism had replaced the White Australia policy since the 1970s, but Islamophobia is now one of White Australia’s new discursive dresses (Sinophobia is another). Besides, it was Australian soldiers who perpetrated the first settler-colonial ethnic cleansing of a Palestinian village in the
20th century, something that Zionist forces would practice on a much larger scale in the 1940s. When the Australians did it, it was 1918, not 1948.

PALESTINIAN SUBJECTION AS ANTISEMITISM

“How did antisemitism get so strange?” Keith Kahn-Harris asks before concluding that “antisemitism has become selective” like other racisms also have. It is a selection that revolves around place, and while attention to sequence suggests that antisemitism and Islamophobia are often negatively correlated, it is significant that this phobia more than other ones has become place-specific. Attention to place and sequence shows that the relationship between the two phobias is mediated by settler colonialism in general and by Zionist settler colonialism in particular (even if Islamophobia has other origins too, of course, as Junaid Rana, for example, has recently explored, including white supremacy and racial liberalism). Support for Zionism is one way in which one phobia transubstantiates into the other.

As we trace this transition, we should craft appropriate responses. In December 2019 President Trump issued an executive order upholding an “expanded” definition of antisemitism. His immediate aim was to interfere with on-campus discussions of Israeli policies vis-à-vis the Palestinian population under occupation. Scholars should resent all interferences with academic freedom, but even if one is forced to adopt this “expanded” definition of antisemitism by law, and it is a big if, and I do not personally see why right-wing billionaires should be able to determine the parameters of admissible scholarly enquiry, I am talking about a Times New Roman 24 big if, one should still demand that the “expanded” definition be applicable to all “Semitic” peoples. Note the inverted commas: the notion of “Semitic” collectives is racist, Orientalist, and Eurocentric, but it applies to Palestinians and Jews equally. Palestinians and Israelis both should enjoy the “inherent” right to self-determination this definition postulates.

Similarly, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance states that “[d]enying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor” is antisemitic. Again, the terms of this definition and the advisability of relying on a single definition, or on that definition specifically, may be debated, and they have been, but surely the same definition should be applicable to all “Semitic” collectives. According to these definitions, denying the Palestinian national collective’s right to self-determination, as the Israeli Occupation of the Palestinian Territories inarguably does, is as antisemitic as it is Islamophobic.

ENDNOTES


For a comparative introduction to the Western politics of Islamophobia, see Abe W. Ata (ed.), Muslim Minorities and Social Cohesion: Cultural Fragmentation in the West (London: Routledge, 2020).

Jonathan Freedland and Mehdi Hasan, “Muslims and Jews Face a Common Threat from White Supremacists. We Must Fight it Together,” The Guardian, April 4, 2019 (available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/03/muslims-jews-white-supremacists). Freedland has in recent years consistently (and much less convincingly) argued that contemporary antisemitism comes from the left.

Freedland and Hasan, “Muslims and Jews.”

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Freedland and Hasan, “Muslims and Jews.”

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Freedland and Hasan, “Muslims and Jews.”


One is disavowed while the other is relentlessly promoted. See Nathan Lean, The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims (London: Pluto Press, 2017).


Traverso, “Islamophobia.”

Traverso, “Islamophobia.”

Traverso, “Islamophobia.”


Displacements like these go the other way round too. If supporting someone else’s settler colonialism enables fantasies about being the victim of hidden conspiracies leading to “great replacements,” then focusing on someone else’s genocide enables obscuring your own. See Jason Chalmers, “Settled Memories on Stolen Land: Settler Mythology at Canada’s National Holocaust Monument,” *American Indian Quarterly*, 43, no. 4 (2019): 379–407.


On the Surafend massacre, when Australian and New Zealand soldiers removed all women and children from the Palestinian village of Surafend and then killed between 40 and 120 unarmed villagers, see Paul Daley, *Beersheba: A Journey through Australia’s Forgotten War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009). This was not a war crime because the war was already over.


On the ways in which Islam and Muslims “are conjured as an object of white supremacy” and are “in a formation of racial becoming,” see Junaid Rana, “Anthropology and the Riddle of White Supremacy,” *American Anthropologist* (2019): 8, 10. Rana observes that as “culture has been imbued with racial ideas, so too has religion” (2), and that the “racial liberal is also settler colonial” (7). Rana sees the link between Islamophobia
and settler colonialism as mediated by racial liberalism. I see it as mediated by settler-colonial Zionism. But the link is there. See also Junaid Rana, “The Racial Infrastructure of the Terror Industrial Complex,” *Social Text*, 34, no. 4 (2016): 111–38.


43 See: https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism
