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# Contemporary Antisemitism Among Muslims

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This paper is divided into four parts. First I want to present a brief overview about the frequency of antisemitism within Muslim majority societies and among Muslims in Europe. Second I will talk about some features and special features of this antisemitism. My third part deals with some reactions of governments and civil societies. Finally, I would like to comment on the current situation of the fight against anti-Semitism among Muslims.

## I. Frequency of antisemitism among Muslims

The Anti-Defamation League’s “Global 100” study of 2014 about antisemitism revealed two facts of relevance for our topic. First: Among all the religious groups tested, Muslims have the highest average index score: 49 % of respondents said that at least 6 of 11 negative stereotypes of Jews were “probably true”. The overall global index was 26%. (Christians: 24%, No religion: 21%, Hindu: 19%, Buddhist: 17%). Second: Region tends to be a stronger factor than religion in determining the existence of antisemitic attitudes. Thus, we find the highest index score – that is 74 % - among

Muslims in the MENA region (**M**iddle **E**ast and **N**orth **A**frica), while the average score for Muslims in Asia was “only” 37 %. And there are interesting differences even within the MENA region: The ADL researchers found the highest index score in the West Bank and Gaza and Iraq with more than 90 % and the lowest index score in Iran with 56%. In addition, this study revealed that a majority of MENA respondents - 63 %! - who had heard about the Holocaust, agreed with the proposition that “it was a myth or an exaggeration”. (<https://global100.adl.org>)

The latter result is confirmed by Meir Litvak’s and Esther Webman’s seminal study "From Empathy to Denial". One of their chapter is titled "The unfinished job – justification of the Holocaust”. According to Litvak and Webman,

“justification of the Holocaust was less prevalent [in the Arab world] than its denial. Still, its very existence, scope, bluntness and the argumentation it contained had no parallel in any other post-war societies. Even old neo-Nazi groups in Europe that sought to rehabilitate the image of Hitler and his regime tended to deny the Holocaust and minimize Nazism’s other crimes, rather than to openly and explicitly justify and defend them. As was the case with Arab [Holocaust] denial, justification was not confined to marginal or radical circles and media, but appeared among mainstream producers of culture, and did not arouse any significant criticism or condemnation in the Arab public discourse.” (Meir Litvak and Esther Webman, *From Empathy to Denial. Arab Responses to the Holocaust*, Hurst Pubs., London 2009, p. 195.)

There is obviously a huge antisemitism problem among Muslims. However, in dealing with it we must not generalize but must differentiate not only between regions but also between individuals. In Europe there are between 15 and 22 million Muslims. Many of them retain close ties to the MENA region. They are able to watch TV channels such as Hizbollah's *al-Manar TV* or Hamas' *al-Aqsa TV* that systematically disseminate Jew-hatred. In Germany, most Muslims have a Turkish background. Here, we are confronted with what might be called the Erdoganization of immigrants with all its antisemitic side effects.

It is therefore no wonder that in Europe too, antisemitic attitudes were far more often found among Muslims than among non-Muslim immigrants or domestic non-Muslims. In 2016, 47% of Muslims and 7% of the UK's total population said they had a 'negative opinion of Jews'. In France, the figures were 28% of Muslims and 13% of the total population, in Germany 44% of Muslims and 22% of the total population. (Günther Jikeli, *Muslimischer Antisemitismus in Europa. Aktuelle Ergebnisse der empirischen Forschung*, in: Marc Grimm, Bodo Kahmann (Eds.), *Antisemitismus im 21. Jahrhundert*, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Berlin 2018, p. 120.)

Radical Islamism presents a particular problem. In Europe, since the beginning of this century, every murder of a Jew has been perpetrated by an Islamist. While even neo-Nazis have refrained from open calls for the murder of Jews in the aftermath of the Shoah, radical Islamists have never felt the need for any such

restraint. Recently, a German neo-Nazi copied the actions of the Islamists by trying to kill as many Jews as possible at Yom Kippur in the synagogue in Halle.

## **II. Is there a special feature of antisemitism among Muslims?**

As non-Muslims, we must be careful when applying the term “Muslim” to individuals. Some people have Muslim names like “Mohammad Ali” but have left their religion and became atheists. Others are observant Muslims or secularized Muslims who visit their mosque once a year at a maximum.

Antisemitism among those who call themselves Muslims has both general and specific characteristics. As with the general population, their aversion to Jews is articulated in a variety of forms – we find here world conspiracy theories, but also secondary antisemitism, Israel-related antisemitism etc. However, there is one kind of antisemitism which is exclusively connected to Muslim communities: That is Islamic antisemitism.

Islamic antisemitism is a religiously motivated form of modern antisemitism and a specific expression of Jew-hatred based on two different sources: The anti-Judaism of early Islam and the conspiratorial antisemitism of modern Europe.

As a rule, the Islamic anti-Judaism of the old days was not determined by fear of Jewish conspiracy and domination, but rather by condescension: Jews were perceived to stand below the Muslims and were expected to accept their lower rank as dhimmis. They were humiliated.

Today, Jews in Germany encounter this language of humiliation. Hundreds of Muslims, for example, demonstrated in Berlin under the slogan: "Jew Jew, cowardly pig, come out and fight alone!" ("Jude, Jude, feiges Schwein, komm' heraus und kämpf' allein!") They also threatened Jews with this particular war cry: "Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews; the army of Muhammad will return." Repeatedly, Jews in Germany have been spat on by Muslims. On one occasion an Arab guy whipped a man wearing a kippa publicly with his belt. In such cases the aspect of humiliation seems to be more important than the physical harm caused by the attack.

Within Christianity, the image of the Jew was always different. Here, it was not the Prophet who killed the Jews but allegedly the Jews who killed the Son of God. Jews were therefore considered to be a dark and potent force, accused of spreading the plague in the Middle Ages and of masterminding casino capitalism in modern times. Only on Christian soil could the propaganda of the "Jewish world conspiracy" as set forth in the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" flourish.

The essence of Islamic antisemitism is the fusion of anti-Judaism from the old Islamic scriptures with modern European antisemitism.

A case in point is the Charter of Hamas. In Article 7, this Charter cites a *hadith* in which the Prophet Muhammad says that the Muslims will kill the Jews "when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say: O Muslim, O servant of God! There is a Jew behind me. Come and kill him." In contrast,

Article 22 of the same Charter states that the Jews “were behind the World War I ... and behind the World War II” and “instigated the replacement of the League of Nations with the United Nations ... to enable them to rule the world through them.”

([https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/hamas.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp)) So the Hamas Charter portrays the Jews on the one hand as degraded, fleeing and hiding behind trees and stones, and on the other as the secret and true rulers of the world. It combines the 7th with the 20th century and thus the worst old Islamic and the worst modern Christian images of the Jews.

Through this mixture, both components become radicalized: European antisemitism is recharged by the religious and fanatical moment of radical Islam, while the old anti-Judaism of the Koran – supplemented by the world conspiracy theory – receives a new and eliminatory quality.

A second case in point is the widespread belief that Jews everywhere, often in league with Israel, are behind a sinister plot to undermine and eradicate Islam. Let me quote Sayyid Qutb’s famous pamphlet “Our Struggle with the Jews”: The “bitter war which the Jews launched against Islam ... has not been extinguished, even for one moment, for close on fourteen centuries until this moment, its blaze raging in all corners of the earth.” (Ronald L. Nettler, *Past Trials & Present Tribulations. A Muslim Fundamentalist’s View of the Jews*, Pergamon Press, Oxford 1987, S. 81f.) This is the classical type of paranoid projection: Those who want to kill the Jews justify their intention

with the phantasm that Jews have launched a bitter war against them.

A variant of this paranoid idea is the "Al Aqsa in danger!" campaign. Amin el-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem started it almost 100 years ago with the claim that Jews not only want to destroy the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem – the third most important sanctuary of Islam – but want to destroy Islam as a whole. This propaganda was activated in July 2017 when Israel tried to upgrade the safety equipment at the Temple Mount and at the end of 2017 when the United States moved their embassy to Jerusalem. We find here a religiously motivated mobilization, which is increasingly supplemented by a second big lie: the laughable assertion that there is no connection at all between the Jews and Jerusalem.

Islamic antisemitism is the main component of a religious war and of a religious mobilization which requires an appropriate response. It turns the confrontation with the Jews into a kind of total war: If the evil of the Jews is immutable and permanent, transcending time and circumstances, there is only one way to cleanse the world of them – by their complete expulsion or annihilation.

It is this that triggers Tehran's desire to destroy the "cancerous tumor" of Israel. It is this that inspires Recep Tayyip Erdogan's threat that Israelis won't be able "to find a tree to hide behind", a clear allusion to the *hadith* mentioned above that calls for the killing of Jews. It is this that causes Mahmoud Abbas to deny any connection between Jerusalem and the Jews.

### **III. How have governments and civil societies reacted?**

I would like to start with some observations from Germany. Yes, some serious attacks by Muslims on Jews have been denounced, and rightly so, by the media. A special focus of concern, for example, has been the growing number of attacks on Jewish pupils by Muslim kids perpetrated in public schools. And there are statements in which the German Bundestag has distanced itself quite sharply from Muslim antisemitism and Muslim anti-Israelism. At the same time, there is neither a strategy nor a serious proposal about how to combat the hatred of Jews among Muslims. Germany's mainstream institutions like the Berlin based Center for Antisemitism Research (Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung) have been extremely reluctant to address this question.

Why is it so difficult to fight this particular form of antisemitism? One main reason is obvious: Islamic antisemitism is connected to the Muslim creed. Western societies, however, are split over their attitude to Islam. One side tends to downplay Islamism and Islamic antisemitism, while the other side seeks to demonize Islam as a whole. Both have a biased point of view.

The downplayers point to the existence of anti-Muslim racism or claim that antisemitism among Muslims is somehow excusable as a reaction to Israel's "misdeeds" or as a means to compensate for the underdog feeling which Muslims experience within Germany society. In both cases, Muslims are not seen as occasional perpetrators but as permanent victims.

The demonizers on the other hand mix up Islamism and Islam in a populist way and try to cast suspicion on all dark-skinned Muslims. The influence of the one side strengthens the influence of the other and vice versa. The success, for example, of the German AfD party, an anti-immigrant party which praises the soldiers of the Wehrmacht and wants to get rid of the commemoration of the Shoah, is partly a reaction to the fact that the political and media elite in Germany has tended and still tends to downplay Islamism and Islamic antisemitism. The stronger, however, the anti-Muslim racism, the easier it becomes to depict serious researchers into Islamic antisemitism as “Islamophobes”. The greater the unwillingness to honestly address this topic, the greater the opportunities for right-wing populists and so on. Serious research is the only way out of this vicious circle, which brings me to my final point.

#### **IV. The current state of the struggle against antisemitism among Muslims**

There is bad news and good news. Bad news first. Together with the cult of martyrdom, Islamic antisemitism is central to the ideological repertoire of both Shiite and Sunni Islamists and fuels their anti-Jewish war. Its abhorrence of peace with Israel increases the danger of an imminent all-out war. How have European governments reacted?

Take the German example. There have been some efforts to counter antisemitism among Muslims through a mixture of education and state prohibitions. These attempts are honourable,

but remain pointless as long as this antisemitism is not countered at its source – that is in Tehran, Beirut, Gaza or Ankara. They remain pointless as long as Jew-hatred incessantly manipulates the Muslims in Germany via social networks in the Turkish, Arabic or Persian languages.

This proves: Islamic antisemitism is a major foreign policy issue. Only governments can stop this flow of hate messages by denouncing and punishing state or non-state actors that allow Islamic antisemitism to be spread in textbooks, mosques, and media. Regrettably, most Western governments including the German one ignore Islamic antisemitism in other parts of the world. Berlin, for example, does not want to jeopardize Germany's privileged relations with Ankara and Tehran. It even refuses to put Hezbollah in its entirety on the terror list. However, as long as a government does not fight antisemitism in its foreign policy, but glosses over and accepts it, its domestic commitment to combat Jew-hatred will always remain half-hearted as well.

But there is also good news. We are currently witnessing a period of thaw in parts of the Arab world not only with respect to Israel, but also in the form of new debates about antisemitism and Islam. Recently, for example, the Israeli flag has been hoisted in Abu Dhabi and the Israeli national anthem, Hatikva, performed in the presence of an Israeli minister, while Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has acknowledged that Israelis have “the right to live peacefully in their state.”

These changes in key parts of the Arab world show that Islam as such does not stand in the way of a normalization of relations with the Jewish state. This refutes the mantra of racists and right-wing populists who want to keep the Muslims trapped in the cage of an immutable culture. At the same time, the whole absurdity of the left wing BDS movement (and its currently most prominent member, Ilhan Omar) becomes evident: While some in the Arab world are about to end their boycott of Israel, this movement is going in exactly the opposite direction in order to immortalize hatred of Israel.

Among Arabs, there is also a new openness with respect to historical facts that contradict the PLO's historiography. 'Abd Al-Hamid Al-Hakim for example, a prominent Saudi intellectual, called via Twitter "to uproot the culture of hatred for Jews" while his colleague Mash'al Al-Sudairi blamed Amin el-Husseini in the London based Saudi daily *Al-Sharq Al Awsat*: "He was the one who tried to combine the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Nazi ideology" and "damaged the [Palestinian] cause more than anyone else." ("Palestinian Leaders – First And Foremost Jerusalem Mufti Al-Husseini and PLO Leader Arafat – Damaged the Palestinian Cause The Most", in: Middle East Media Research, May 31, 2018, Special Dispatch No. 7499.)

This corresponds with the findings of our new research about the origin of Islamic antisemitism. What triggered Islamic antisemitism? As a rule, two answers are given. To cut a long story short: Right wingers are convinced that it is intrinsic to Islam while left wingers say it is all Israel's own fault. In reality, however, it is

known that both Zionism and Islam have played a role but not the decisive one. New research proves that Nazi propaganda in the Arab language, disseminated between 1937 and 1945, was also essential. Nazi Germany exploited the Arabs' rejection of Zionism and used the antisemitic potential of this rejection in pamphlets and radio programs in the Arabic language that were broadcast three times a day and seven days a week between April 1939 and April 1945. Radio Zeesen was the short wave transmitter located on the outskirts of Berlin, whose influence has rarely been taken into account by historians of the Middle East. Meanwhile, Jeffrey Herf in his ground-breaking "Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World", David Motadel in his "Islam and Nazi Germany's War" and I myself in my new book about "Nazis and the Middle East" have written extensively about this "long-range gun in the ether" as Joseph Goebbels dubbed it. This ongoing propaganda strengthened an exclusively anti-Jewish reading of the Islamic scriptures, popularized European conspiracy theories and agitated in an antisemitic manner against the Zionist project.

Another case in point is the pamphlet "Islam and the Jews". This paper from 1937 was printed and disseminated by the Nazis in many languages and editions during World War II. It was the very first text that propagated antisemitic Jew-hatred in an Islamic context by combining selected anti-Jewish episodes from Muhammad's life with the so-called wickedness of Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was thus the starting shot of Islamic antisemitism. This most toxic paper against Jewry was published and disseminated in 1937 – 11 years before the founding of Israel and 20 years before

the Six-Day War. This fact alone contradicts the widespread assumption that Islamic antisemitism was just a response to Israel's actions and suggests the idea that Arabs did not necessarily become antisemites because they were anti-Israel but that they perhaps became anti-Israel because they were antisemites.

To conclude: Challenging antisemitism among Muslims is not only about protecting the Jewish communities in Europe and the Middle East. It is crucial for peace in the world. One important feature of this Jew-hatred is Islamic antisemitism. Islamic antisemitism, however, is a relatively recent concoction one of whose essential ingredients was Nazi propaganda. Perhaps, in the context of an intra-Islamic debate, the time is now ripe for a serious challenge not only to Islamic antisemitism but to other forms of Jew-hatred as well.