



A new explanation of antisemitism: Jew hatred as a civilisational phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

This article connects antisemitism to the borrowed monotheism of Christianity and Islam and the psychological dynamics of envy and inferiority complex vis-à-vis the Jews this borrowing of God produces among intellectual leaders of the two derivative monotheistic communities. Through tropes created by these leaders, antisemitism deeply affects the consciousness of the general population in these communities. Understanding antisemitism as a phenomenon characteristic of the monotheistic ('Western') civilisation, allows one to explain both its ubiquity across many societies and historical periods constituting this civilisation and the absence of native antisemitic traditions in China and India.

KEYWORDS Antisemitism; Christian antisemitism; Islamic antisemitism; borrowed monotheism; collective inferiority complex; envy; monotheistic civilisation; tropes

A couple of years ago, while I was teaching in Hong Kong and led a general discussion on the differences between the Chinese and Western civilisations, a young woman from mainland China interjected: 'What I don't understand about Western civilisation is why is there antisemitism!' This was a surprising remark, stopping the discussion in its tracks, because it did not veer anywhere near the subject before. Its effect on me was explosive. At least for this young woman, antisemitism was the distinguishing characteristic of our entire civilisation. Not, for instance, freedom or economic prosperity, but hostility to the Jews. We, on our side, in the back of our minds know of the permanence and ubiquity of this attitude, but very rarely ask the question why this is so, repeatedly treating its episodes as unconnected, each demanding a separate explanation and solution. It requires a true outsider to show us that antisemitism runs like a red thread through the entire history of the cultural framework that unites all Western societies – all societies, that is, Christian and Muslim, which look Western from the Chinese perspective. The two other contemporary civilisations, Sinic and

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Indic, lack indigenous antisemitic traditions and throughout their very long histories manifest remarkably little awareness of Jews altogether. A comparison with them prompts us to connect monotheism and antisemitism, making possible a systematic analysis and explanation of antisemitism.

What is antisemitism

The word ‘antisemitism’ refers specifically and exclusively to Jew-hatred. Unlike many other words, it was invented intentionally – by a German ‘progressive’ small-time writer, Wilhelm Marr, in 1871 – to replace the traditional term ‘anti-Judaism’ and to stress the racial essence of the sentiment. Religious Jew-hatred was thereby subsumed in racial Jew-hatred. The word applies to all the expressions of the hostility to the Jews *as a group*, i.e. as a nation/race, a religion, a class, a state. It is a sign not open to interpretation. In distinction to symbols naturally evolving out of the changing contexts, intentionally invented signs are inseparable from the referent they were originally intended to signify.

When the object of hatred is a group, rather than individuals, individuals are not seen as agents but as embodiments of the group agency. It is then justified to hate completely innocent people who have done nothing wrong and even theoretically could not have done anything wrong, such as children. Put in this emblematic – explicitly symbolic – position, individuals are hated not because of what they do, but because of what they are. This testifies to the *irrational* nature of Jew-hatred – that is, to its rationally unjustifiable character.

Hatred is a psychological phenomenon. Its explanation must have a psychological component. Occasional hatreds are contingent; their psychological component – the human ability to hate – is only a condition in which historical (contextual) causes are allowed to operate. But a continuously targeted hatred, cutting through particular historical contexts, while, perhaps, triggered by historical contexts, is caused, and must be fully explained, psychologically. Its relevant historical context, or framework, includes all the particular historical contexts within which it occurs, depriving them of causal significance; it is the historical context which creates the specific psychological dynamic.

What is the psychological dynamic of a continuous targeted hatred? In my studies of nationalism,¹ I was able to trace it to a *complex of collective inferiority*. Though always personally experienced, a continuous hatred that lasts for generations cannot be related to personal grievances or offences by particular individuals; it must derive from a grievance of a group against another group. It is necessarily irrational, not provoked by the threat to objective, i.e. actually entertained and empirically provable interests and attempts to realise them, because such interests change from generation to

generation, as do the agents who oppose them. In the case of nationalism, which spread through importation, importer societies or their agents *chose* the source of importation as their model, an object of admiration deserving of imitation. Originally, they believed this source to be superior to themselves – and themselves, naturally, inferior to the source and in need of improvement through imitation – but were certain that they would a) soon become equal to, if not better than, their models; and b) be admired by them for their efforts. As a rule, this optimistic anticipation was not fulfilled: equality proved impossible or at least was infinitely delayed, and, worse than that, the models never thought much of the imitators' efforts. Thus, the imitators were left with the nagging sense of the ineradicable superiority of their models and insupportable, humiliating suspicion of their own permanent inferiority.

Under this emotional distress their initial admiration of the model gave way to a much less benign sentiment of envy – existential envy, that is, the envy of the model's existential significance which, by comparison, deprived the imitators' very existence of value. A powerful irritant, constantly rekindled by the model's presence, this envy poisoned them from within, festered, and turned to hatred. Actuated by hatred, they then transformed the model into the anti-model, ascribing to it as many vices as they previously discerned in its virtues, and making the struggle against it a central orientation of their national consciousness. Following Nietzsche and Scheller, I called this psychological syndrome *ressentiment*. It is not very different from the process born of 'mimetic desire' which Rene Girard recognised in ancient Greek tragedy and used in the explanation of the centrality of violence in the practice of Greek religion.² One can appreciate the power of profound envy, necessarily based on the sense of inferiority, to generate hatred and violence. The connection between making a recognised superior one's model to imitate (thereby acknowledging one's inferiority), the frustration of the mimetic desire (to become the same as the model), the transformation of the model into the anti-model to be destroyed (to assuage this frustration), and violence, observed in such different historical contexts as Greek religion and tragedy, on the one hand, and the spread of nationalism in the 18th and 19th centuries proves this power. In the case of nationalism, *ressentiment* would be particularly lasting and pervasive when the material resources of the importing society encouraged it to compete with its model for dignity (standing in the world, international prestige) and it had no history of recognised cultural achievement prior to developing national consciousness. Jew-hatred, antisemitism, belongs to the same class of psychological phenomena.

It should be noted that rationally-motivated violence differs in kind from violence that is motivated irrationally. Violence accompanying rational conflicts is *instrumental* – when the declared goal is achieved, it ceases. In

modern warfare, the destruction of enemy combatants puts an end to the conflict. It is the efficiency of combat, not the suffering inflicted on the enemy, that is valued. Even regarding enemy combatants, persuasion is preferred to killing. Even if killing is unavoidable, the speed, not cruelty of death is what matters. Collateral damage, destruction of civilian lives, as a rule, is regretted. Even if intentionally pursued in the interest of persuasion, as in the bombing of Dresden or (however inexcusable) the Japanese cities, it is the speed of destruction, not the cruelty of the process that matters.

Not so with violence inspired by a psychopathology such as inferiority complex and the resulting *ressentiment*. In such a case violence, directed specifically at civilians who pose no objective threat to perpetrators whatsoever, is *expressive*, and the achievement of the declared military goal has virtually nothing to do with it. It can end only with the complete emotional relief (which is its actual goal) of those who initiate it. In its exercise cruelty, suffering inflicted on the victims before death, is more important than efficiency, even if, as in killing by gas, it is paid lip-service. Torture and humiliation of the defenceless victims that give perpetrators the sense of superiority over those in their power are essential for this kind of violence. The perpetrators *enjoy* what they do, which counteracts the disturbing sense of inferiority that turns them into violent haters – sadists – in the first place. This violence, however, provides perpetrators only temporary relief, which is why it is constantly renewed. The continued collective existence itself of the victims (not to mention their successes) sustains the perpetrators' complex of inferiority, and nothing but extermination – ultimate humiliation of the object of their existential envy – can relieve them permanently.

Antisemitic expressive violence insists on presenting itself as defensive in a rational, instrumental way, a response to specific actions or threats of the Jews. These threats are always imaginary, reflecting cultural tropes – be they decide, financial control of the world, or 'settler colonialism' – not reality. In the modern era, these presumed crimes and dangers often take the form of actual schizophrenic delusions as in Hitler's literal conception of Jews as parasites, which his audience might have considered a metaphor but he most probably truly believed, or – fortunately private – psychotic fantasies of John Nash.

Why is there antisemitism

Motivated continuously and irrespective of the specific historical context by the sense of inferiority to Jews, existential envy of them, in contrast to common forms of hostility to the out-group, which are always context-dependent, antisemitism is irrational. As such it emerges only with the spread of Christianity beyond its original Jewish converts. Antisemitism does not result from any declared political (or economic) interest; the

interest it expresses cannot be declared, because its very acknowledgement would prevent its realisation (indeed, very often antisemitism goes against the antisemites' declared interests): it is a way to assuage the pain of the complex of inferiority that necessarily arises from comparing the antisemite's community (religious or political) to the Jews, a form of self-therapy that won't work if one understands its psychological roots.

Our socio-cultural world is based on monotheism. In other words, all of our civilisation's creative qualities were conditioned, if not directly caused, by monotheism and would not be possible without it. This, in turn, means that it developed out of the Jewish civilisation, which preceded its formation by some 3,000 years and was later incorporated into it, never losing its formative influence. Today the monotheistic civilisation is shared by over 4 billion people, more than a half of the human population. If we limit ourselves to 4 billion, 99.9% of people the monotheistic civilisation today contains are those for whom monotheism is not original, their own, but **borrowed**. It is still monotheism – the faith in One God, with everything that follows from such faith. But this God is borrowed from the Jews, and this is recognised in the Holy Scriptures (such as the Bible and the Qur'an) and by the faithful.

Borrowed monotheism inevitably leads to 1) The complex of religious inferiority and 2) Existential envy – *ressentiment*, hatred – towards the people whose God is borrowed/from whom God is borrowed. Antisemitism, in other words, is implicit in it. ***Our civilisation – the monotheistic civilisation, almost entirely a civilisation of borrowed monotheism – may be properly named the antisemitic civilisation.***

As noted above, 'mimetic desire' – a desire for making one's own an admired possession or quality of another and the choice of this other as a model for imitation – under certain conditions leads to the paradoxical transformation of the admiration into hatred and of the model into the anti-model. This happens when the appropriation of the desired possession or quality proves impossible and the model refuses the imitator recognition. Given that the imitator, by definition, regards oneself or one's group as inferior to the model (an individual or a group), the initial sense of inferiority develops into a self-destabilising psychological complex and leads to *ressentiment*. The enormous creative potential of *ressentiment* on the group level – its ability to shape collective consciousness and orient action is clearly demonstrated in the history of nationalism, the development of collectivistic ethnic nationalism, specifically. An expression of the sense of inferiority by comparison to the model one (architects of an imported nationalism) wants to imitate, it is experienced as a feeling of existential envy, the desire for one's nation to replace/take the place of the initially admired other and, in full blossom, hatred which becomes built into the national identity and consciousness through the transvaluation, inversion of the borrowed values and

the projection of one's originally unproblematically, and then only dimly, perceived vices onto the model turned anti-model.

The same psychological dynamic is operative on the level above nationalism – that of civilisation³ – when the first civilisational principles are borrowed and civilisational identity of the borrower by definition references the lender and is not self-sufficient. This makes the permanence and ubiquity of antisemitism within the monotheistic civilisation understandable. Judaism is the foundation of the monotheistic (i.e. Western) civilisation. The One God billions of Christians and Muslims worship is the Jewish God, the God of the Hebrew Bible, the Creator of and the central participant in the history of the Jewish People it depicts. The attention of Christians and Muslims is of necessity fixed on Jews; their identity (as Christians and as Muslims) is not self-sufficient, it depends on a justification of their separation from Jews, on explaining why they (Christians and Muslims) – believers as they are in the Jewish God – are not Jews themselves. Psychologically, this cannot be explained by their being insufficiently good Jews, it must be explained by some egregious failing on the part of the Jews.

The psychological problem in which Christianity and Islam find themselves as a necessary result of their acceptance of Jewish monotheism is dramatically magnified by to them undeniable God's choice of the Jews as His own people far ahead and above them. They know that, *in the eyes of God*, they are inferior to the Jews. God's obvious preference forever replays the parable of Cain and Abel for Christians and Muslims: they forever envy the Jews this preference and are forever doomed to seek the latter's perdition. *Lest they deny their own identity – they must be anti-Semitic*, in other words. Indeed, this is a sibling rivalry of sorts, on a very large scale: a futile and therefore endless competition for the love of the supremely important parent, once and for all given to the eldest child.

Of course, this is not the problem affecting the majority of Christians and Muslims: the vast majority are practicing their faith without ever giving thought to such questions or any doctrinal matter. This problem bothers only the small theologically-literate thinking elite. But it is this elite which spreads the word and, while doing so, creates *tropes* – the most important instrument of institutionalisation. Tropes are constantly repeated narrative conventions, acquired with language as fully formed habits of thought with corresponding emotional attitudes. The knowledge of a trope is certain but implicit, like the knowledge of words in the mother-tongue. And, as one does not give any thought to common words while using them, so one does not give any self-conscious thought to a trope which is deployed. On the neurological level, therefore, a trope exists in the brain of the member of a culture in its original etymological sense of a (beaten) path, an established neural pathway. Tropes reduce complex symbolic messages to signs which require no interpretation: both

their significance and reactions to them, i.e. both the stimulus and response, become automatic. Discouraging explicit thinking, tropes are likely to rely on the systems and mechanisms of implicit, long-term, consolidated memory. Neurologically, they are imbedded deeper in the brain than other linguistic devices. Deeply embedded but not consciously thought about ways of thinking, and therefore acting, they carry on social institutions. Whenever we speak of systemic or institutionalised this or that (e.g. in the US, we often speak of institutionalised racism), we do in fact speak of tropes that define our subconscious – i.e. not explicit – attitudes, attitudes we would in many cases explicitly deny, if asked point blank whether we subscribe to them. The longer an attitude is transmitted through tropes, the deeper its institutionalisation goes. Within our, monotheistic, civilisation antisemitism is the deepest embedded – the oldest, the strongest – institution.

Christianity

A very large body of scholarly work focuses on the Christian polemics ‘*adversus Iudaeos*’ – the name under which antisemitism appeared. The history of early Christian thought, the tremendously important centuries between the 2nd and the 7th centuries CE, is in effect a history of antisemitism. If Jew-hatred is not the only aspect of Christian theology of this formative period, it is undoubtedly its central aspect. And it remains at least a central aspect of Christian thought for another 5–6 centuries after that. The greatest Christian theologians (including St. Augustine in the 4th century, St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th) participate in the development of explicit antisemitism – a thousand-year-long continuous labour by the best minds and the most authoritative cultural figures of a millennium, by preachers and teachers of the largely illiterate masses for whom they constituted the only source of knowledge.

In the main, this scholarship is exegetical, it analyses the historical roots and contexts of the particular concepts, specific historical considerations and interests behind their emergence, and the cultural background against which they emerge. Drawing attention to the conditions and reasons behind individual developments in, and the meandering path of, the *contra Iudaeos* tradition, it does not necessarily stress the connection between it and antisemitism and sometimes explicitly questions its direct relevance to the latter. But, even disregarding the record of the unflagging legal, economic, and social discrimination of Jews as a *tolerated* community within Imperial and post-Imperial medieval Christendom and periodic but frequent physical attacks on them, ‘polemic’ means ‘war’ (from the Greek *polemos*), thus ‘*adversus Iudaeos*’ polemic clearly and openly announces itself as ‘war against the Jews’. Given that ways of acting by and large follow the ways of thinking,

it can be logically deduced that this tradition of Christian rhetoric directly translated to practical antisemitism.

Exegetical scholarship of the first Christian millennium willy-nilly investigates and draws attention to the creation of antisemitic tropes. Based on it, one can distinguish several stages in the transmission of antisemitism through Christianity. The *adversus Iudaeos* polemic begins, not unexpectedly, with a polemic within the Jewish community of a new Jewish sect – the followers of Jesus – against their co-religionists not convinced that Jesus was the divine messiah. This sectarian polemic starting already in the first century CE, the only thing that sharply differentiates it from other sectarian controversies within traditionally disputatious Judaism is that it was destined to be apotheosised as the Christian New Testament. The direct reason that it is so apotheosised, arguably,⁴ is the reaction of a second-century Jew Marcion of Sinope to the crash by the Romans of Bar-Kokhba revolt of 132–35.

Marcion's role in the history of Christianity is hard to overestimate: he invented the term *Christianity* itself, the idea of *New Testament*, the contents of which, including the canonical gospels, were based on the materials he assembled, and gave the name to the *gospel* (*euangelion*) genre. Marcion was the follower of Paul, accepting the eschatological message of Jesus as the latter interpreted it – 'a spiritual Judaism in a Greco-Roman spirit ... [of] colonial inclusivity'. He organised and put in writing the stories about Jesus that circulated as an oral tradition. This foundational work being 'rapidly picked up, altered and presented to the public as the Gospels', which Marcion considered plagiarism, he in turn edited and made public an anonymous Gospel, supplemented it by ten of Paul's letters, added a preface, titled 'Antithesis', and called the entire work the 'New Testament'. The 'new testament' was the new covenant between God and humanity, no longer restricted to Jews who were party to the 'old covenant', and no longer testified in the flesh, but in the 'circumcision of the heart' – not in the obedience to the letter of the law, but in the spirit. A central theme in it was political non-involvement and the substitution for the principle of retributive justice the insistence on love and non-aggression 'even in the face of aggressors, foes and persecutors'. Indeed, it was very much in the spirit of 'turning the other cheek' that Marcion adopted the common put-down 'Christians', used by both Jews and Romans to belittle people like himself, as the basis for the name of the faith he advocated, Christianity.

Though officially rejected by Church fathers, much of Marcion's thinking was obviously incorporated into the Christian Scriptures. The 'intra-Jewish arguments' of the Gospels and Pauline letters in the New Testament proved a wonderful foundation for the later Christian *contra Iudaeos* rhetoric to build on. It was, says Paula Fredriksen, 'a gold mine' for it.⁵ The 'fleshliness' of the Jews, their lack of spirituality, affecting among other things their ability

to understand their own texts, their materialism (the natural opposite of spirituality), worship of the letter of the law, 'the proverbially stony Jewish heart' which reflects this legalism – all these tropes are already found there, by mid-second century CE, 'the full arsenal of argument is already well displayed'. But in the next two centuries it undergoes a 'lush development'. In the meantime, Christianity changes status becoming the official religion of the mighty Roman Empire and the intra-Jewish arguments transform into arguments against the Jews. It is easy for those who trace the history of every idea associated with the tradition to miss this moment of the birth of the new tradition, antisemitism. What appears the continuous tradition is no longer the same because the people behind it, and their interests, are drastically different.

By mid-fourth century CE, Christianity is an exclusively Gentile enterprise and *adversus Iudaeos* moves into high gear. Scholars find the 'hyper-development' of the polemic in the decades after Constantine's conversion 'curious': after all, the Church is in every respect victorious, why such savage defensiveness? But there is nothing curious about it. This is when existential envy of the Jews kicks in.

Christian Jews had nothing to envy their co-religionists who stuck by the tradition, the tradition belonged to all of them equally, they simply wanted to convince other Jews in the truth of their new point of view. Gentile Christians faced an altogether different – and incomparably greater – problem: they appropriated God who was not theirs and who chose Jews as His own People. To rid themselves of their sense of inferiority and overwhelming debt to the Jews, they must humiliate the Jews. Thus, *adversus Iudaeos* rhetoric becomes unhinged, there is no more reasoning with the opponent, only abuse. Spewing against Jews epithets such as 'agents of the devil', 'carriers of disease', 'drunkards and whoremasters' (indubitably related to their 'fleshliness'), and 'ravenous wolves' earns John Chrysostom his admiring nickname, 'the gold-lipped', and sainthood. Antisemitic tropes proliferate. One of the most dangerous and enduring enters the tradition through laws designed in late Roman Empire to protect Christians as wives to Jewish husbands, plaintiffs to Jewish magistrates, and so on from being subject to Jewish authority, which in Visigothic Spain, remarkably, were *applied to converted Jews as well* – the trope of Jews' 'deadly dominion'. All have heard of the Jewish dominion, deadly by definition, in Hollywood, international finance and politics, Palestinian territories.

None of the Christian antisemitic tropes has been of a greater moment than that of Jews as the killers of Christ. This racist and irrational image that justified every Jewish massacre in Christian and post-Christian Europe, including to a very large extent the Holocaust, and made the Church, if not an active participant, at least complicit in these atrocities through its unwillingness or inability to give up the idea of Jews as Christ-killers, has proved

ineradicable. To the papal curia, ridden by guilt for the acquiescence of the Church in the extermination of one third of world Jewry, it was clear by 1965 that the Holocaust made the idea of Jewish collective guilt transmitted from generation to generation by blood intellectually unjustifiable. But, 'so deeply has this portrayal of the Jew penetrated Christian thought', Jeremy Cohen writes, 'that [the curia] encountered more than token resistance at the Second Vatican Council . . . even in the aftermath of the council, the notion of collective guilt [for deicide] continues to appear in contemporary Christian scholarship, both Catholic and Protestant'.⁶

Guilt over Jewish massacres does not always lead to the questioning of antisemitic attitudes. In fact, it is more likely to lead to the strengthening of these attitudes, which did happen several times, once involving specifically the Christ-killers trope. Though of no importance to ordinary faithful, the inventors of the trope spent a lot of time pondering *why* Jews murdered God's son and messiah promised to them in their own Scriptures. Until the 8th century CE, the undisputed idea of the Jewish crime of deicide was a sufficient reason for the displacement of the Jews from the position of God's chosen People and Christian supersession in it. Associated with St. Augustine, the argument was that in their inability to recognise the messiah promised to them by their own prophets in their own Bible, they betrayed their faith, Judaism. The Church, therefore, rightly broke its ties with this recalcitrant community, i.e. in the spirit of 'mimetic desire', Christians' redefinition of themselves as different from Jews was justified by the fact that the Jews were not good Jews, that Christians were better Jews. (Thus, the Christ-killers trope ramified to Jews as unlawful, spiritually disobedient, by nature enemies of God, and murderers of prophets.) The inability of the Jews to recognise the true nature of Jesus was ultimately due to their native stupidity or, as this was phrased, ignorance.

In the 8th century, Venerable Bede raised another possibility. Bede, it was argued, 'was pressed by a problem at once historical and exegetical: . . . If . . . Jesus had begged for forgiveness on behalf of the Jews as he died on the cross, God could only have acceded to his request. How, then, have the Jews been living in a state which bespeaks their enduring guilt and punishment?' Bede's problem must have been psychological as well – the discomfort of those who, while not sadists/mentally ill, cause and tolerate Jewish suffering. As with the Holocaust, the surest way to ease it is to justify this suffering. Bede's answer pointed to 'the connection drawn by Jesus between forgiveness and ignorance' and he suggested 'that the leaders of the Jews killed the Son of God not in ignorance but out of envy'. In the 12th century with 'the massacres of European Jews which accompanied the Crusades' Bede's argument was followed and developed.

The construction of the 'tradition of intentionality', says Cohen, involved much 'exegetical acrobatics'. At their most creative, they completely let go of

common sense. Some argued that Jesus' forgiveness applied only to the masses of uneducated Jews, while their leaders clearly recognised Jesus as the messiah, and thus did not deserve forgiveness, though they were ignorant of Jesus' divinity. In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas elaborated 'Whatever ignorance might have characterized the [leaders] it in no way detracted from the gravity of their crime because it was somehow voluntary, deriving from their own hatred and envy'. Later, Duns Scotus 'rejected out of hand Anselm's opinion that no man could knowingly kill his God ... And Nicholas of Lyra [argued that] the biblical evidence for the ignorance of Jews [attested] merely the failure of their knowledge to withstand their malice and ultimately to govern their actions ... Concerned above all with their own power and stature, they ... maliciously engineered the murder of their real saviour'.

The educated Jews, in other words, were not only wicked but also incredibly stupid. They were so wicked that their wickedness blinded them to their own obvious interest to be on God's side. They *chose* perdition. They would rather be destroyed than restrain their murderous malice. Like addicts or wild beasts, unable to delay immediate gratification for their own greater good, they could not help themselves. Or were they atheists? A possibility unimaginable at the time. And where does this leave the uneducated Jewish masses? Was it their learning, the texts they read, that made Jewish leaders at once so clear-sighted, so wicked, and so stupid or were these contradictory qualities innate (in which case they would obviously be shared by all Jews)?

However that may be, all Jews were condemned, the 'intentionality tradition' giving rise to a new generation of antisemitic tropes, expressing a conception that was not simply negative, abusive, and denigrating, but which presented Jews as unnatural, moved by forces that did not move other humans – thus non-human, perhaps super-human, demonic and consequently very dangerous. This 'must have been a very widespread conception', wrote Cecil Roth, 'particularly among the less educated; and it explains a good deal in the medieval religious mentality which otherwise remains incomprehensible'. Only a people so conceived 'could have been charged with the unnatural atrocities that medieval Europeans attributed to the Jews: host-desecration, well-poisoning, and ritual murder'. These tropes led to countless massacres. Today, eight centuries after the establishment of the intentionality argument, they survive in the essentially secular environment (as demonstrated by the record of the UN, among others), spread and reinforced by the social media.⁷

Envy is central to all these developments. It is in envy that Jewish wickedness expresses itself above all, according to the intentionality tradition. To zero in on one specific emotion indicating such a general attribute as wickedness one must be well familiar with it. Indeed, Christian theologians know how it feels from experience: it is painful and humiliating, it makes

a person ashamed of oneself. And so, they attribute this feeling to Jews, reasoning that it is only just that the Jews feel that way. But, being personally familiar with the feeling of envy, the theologians do not understand – they cannot allow themselves to understand – the conditions that arouse envy: one can only envy the like, those to whom one is comparable. One does not envy the categorically different, because one cannot be, even theoretically, in aspiration, like them. Only as a metaphor we can envy birds their ability to fly. Christian theologians ascribe their own envy of the Jews to the Jews – as their envy of God's son. But why would anyone envy God's Son? No mortal is comparable to God's Son. What could the Jews envy, especially if they knew – as the tradition of intentionality insisted, they did – that Jesus was divine? They knew they were not and could never be like Him.

The existential envy theologians experience in regard to the Jews is often reinforced by the mundane envy of their qualities or possessions. It is the appeal of Judaism, of the synagogue, to pagans not yet decided between the monotheistic options they encounter in the Roman Empire of the 4th century and hesitant Gentile Christians among his parishioners that adds fire to Chrysostom's rhetoric. Christian preachers in Antioch of John's days directly competed for audience with Jews, so, in addition to desiring their God to be his own – which recommended them to his hatred – he envied them simply for being more attractive. It was also common envy that stirred up anti-semitism in the 12th century: 'a rising Christian middle class clamoured for the exclusion of the Jews from walks of economic life' in which they were corralled by the Christian authorities and thus 'had figured prominently for centuries'. This quotidian envy did not create tropes but made very efficient use of those already in existence. Naked self-interest and tropes born out of the complex of inferiority combined to inspire massacres; massacres created the psychological need to justify them, which created new tropes, and so it has snowballed. Often antisemitism heated up for political reasons with a similar effect.

The rational interests, always produced by specific historical contexts can only add to the description of the circumstances and manner in which antisemitism expressed itself in any particular episode; they do not help us to *understand* antisemitism. Antisemitism is explained by antisemites' emotional interests, that is, their unacknowledged psychological needs. That this is so is demonstrated by the comparison of the Christian and Islamic anti-semitic traditions. Different in every historical detail of the development of Jew-hatred in them, they are identical in its nature and expressions, down to specific tropes. This means that looking for the origins of antisemitism even in the entire cultural histories of these two great religions (on the level of functionally-integrated systems of institutions – which is the highest level on which history is practiced) is futile. Its psychological (psycho-historical) sources lie much deeper – on the level of civilisations. Jew-hatred is the

core expression of the psycho-cultural dynamics of our, monotheistic, civilisation in the framework of which both Christianity and Islam arose and have evolved.

Islam

It has been long assumed that Islam has been much more friendly to the Jews than Christianity. Thus, Islamic antisemitism is far less explored and believed to be a modern importation from the West. This assumption is not supported by historical evidence. How much safer the world would be for the Jews were it supported! Unfortunately, antisemitism is as deeply rooted in Islam as it is in Christianity. It is also strikingly similar to the Christian antisemitism, despite having developed in completely different historical conditions against a radically dissimilar cultural background. This shocking similarity between the two antisemitic traditions, historically essentially unrelated and developing in contexts that have nothing in common, can only be explained by the shared psycho-historical cause, by a psychological reason or need generated by the general historical context on the civilisational level above any specific historical contexts.

Unlike Christianity, Islam did not originate as a sect in Judaism to eventually separate from it politically. Nevertheless, this other great monotheistic religion stands in the same relation to Judaism: like Christianity, it is a religion of monotheism borrowed from the Jews. Like Christianity, Islam is generated by ‘mimetic desire’ for Judaism; Judaism is chosen as its model, an acknowledged and admired superior, whom one wishes to join in its existential essence, identity, to be like. A necessary condition for the realisation of this desire is to be accepted and admired by Judaism, the agreement by the Jews to share its identity and recognise: yes, you are like us, you are us. The refusal of the Jews to give their ascent necessarily results in the rigidification of the originally unproblematically experienced inferiority vis-à-vis the model religion into an inextinguishable *complex* of inferiority, the defensive change of the initial admiration into existential envy and hatred, and the transformation of the model into the anti-model – of the embodiment of the cosmic good into the embodiment of the cosmic evil.

Unlike Christian antisemitism that takes several centuries to develop and begin exerting mass influence through tropes, Islamic antisemitism is born together with Islam, coming into the world complete in the form that it is to keep forever as a part of divine revelation in the Qur’an. It is from the beginning institutionalised. As soon as the religion of Islam is preached, expressions of Islamic antisemitism become tropes. Coming directly from God, the Qur’an cannot be doubted, questioned, or innovated upon. It is absolutely true in its contents as well as form – a trope in its entirety – and can be interpreted only in the way of endless repetition

and application to new situations. As we are reminded by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University – one of Sunni Islam’s most venerable religious institution – Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, more than one-third of the Qur’an is devoted to the Jews.⁸ Jews are the supreme preoccupation of God himself. The antisemitism in ‘Allah’s book’ is reinforced in the overlapping canonical *hadith* (stories about Muhammad) and *sira* (Muhammad’s biographies).

The Qur’an is a transparent expression of the spurned ‘mimetic desire’, *ressentiment*. More than one-third of it is the angry lamentation over not being accepted by the Jews; the rest is the presentation of the biblical story of the relationship between God and the People of Israel as the story of Islam. The story is ingeniously modified, but always allows to see the source behind the modifications, never losing the ‘transparency’ characteristic of the *ressentiment*-based transvaluation of values. Abraham is claimed as a ‘pious Muslim’, as attested by Q. 3:67, making Islam the original monotheistic faith, established in Arabia already by Adam. The Prophet Muhammad, who was to revive the primordial Arabian monotheism descended in a direct line from Abraham. Abd al-Muttalib, Muhammad’s grandfather, planned to sacrifice his son Abdallah, Muhammad’s father, to the supreme god of the Ka’ba, but, with the knife already in his hand, was stopped, advised to consult a sorceress conversant with familiar spirits, and sacrificed 100 camels instead. Leaving aside the fact that a sorceress and a familiar spirit are not God, the story bears a close resemblance to the Biblical incident described in *Genesis 22* – of the Binding of Isaac. Writes Reuven Firestone:

like Abraham’s son Isaac, Abdallah was not a very well-developed figure in Islamic sacred history The key in the Arabian narrative is the product or offspring of the intended sacrifice. It was the inscrutable reversal of the divine decree that, in both the Biblical and Arabian cases, enabled the leader of the religious nation to be born. Muhammad, like his parallel in the Biblical narrative, Jacob, was the founder of a great nation, the *umma* or religious peoplehood of Islam, corresponding in Islamic tradition to the Children of Israel in the Bible.⁹

This cultural appropriation, bespeaking ‘Islam’s primordial supersession of Judaism’¹⁰ should have eliminated the need to constantly belittle the Jews and drag them off from the pedestal of God’s special people. Nevertheless, such belittling and dragging off – the humiliation of the Jews – is never given up, as if God in His book remains of two minds regarding His choice.

Like with Christianity, God’s choice was indeed the main irritant, but it was claimed *ad nauseam* that the Jews usurped their chosenness. That’s why arrogance and pride have featured so prominently among the antisemitic accusations in the Islamic texts. The endlessly quoted Q. 5:82, asserting that Jews are ‘the fiercest enemies’ of Islam, states:

You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews . . . and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say 'We are Christians'. This is because . . . they are not arrogant.

Given that the preferred method of Islamic commentary is repetition, glosses on Q. 5:82 since the 7th century until today repeat this assertion. One from the greatest Shiite Qur'anic authority in the 20th century stresses the Jews' 'proud behaviour, arrogance, haughtiness'; 'their sustained arrogance' has 'continued in the same manner even after the Prophet'. One from his Sunni counterpart echoes: their enmity 'is rooted in spite and pride'.¹¹

There is no possibility to interpret the very frequent discussion of Israel's election in the Bible as anything but God's choice: 'The Lord your God chose you from among all other peoples on earth to be His treasured people' (Deut. 14:2); 'God has chosen His beloved Abraham and his descendants' (Isaiah 41:8), etc., etc. The knowledge of being so chosen must have given the people a sense of dignity, but there is no reason why it would have provoked in its members haughtiness or arrogance. The relationship of the Jews with God (personally reinforced in the case of every man in the community) gave their life meaning and defined their identity, their cosmic place. Their existential experience, therefore, was completely self-sufficient, it was not affected by reference to any other community that could touch them only physically; comparisons with other communities were simply irrelevant, psychologically insignificant. Such attitudes as arrogance, haughtiness, and pride, however, presuppose the centrality of comparisons for one's identity. They could only be attributed to Jews by those who looked up to the Jews presuming that the Jews, therefore, looked down on them.

It made no difference for Islam (as it did not earlier for Christianity), that God's choice of the Jews as the People *consecrated* to Him implied, in the first place, a heavy burden of responsibility. In their 'mimetic desire', the borrowers of monotheism were so supremely irked by the privilege that God's relationship with Israel implied, that they did not see this burden. Therefore, they were unable to recognise that being so 'chosen' was only meaningful for the Jews. Jews did not care what anyone else thought. They also did not care whether anyone else recognised their God even when His universality was obviously clear; they let others be others. God, unlike the Allah of the Qur'an, apparently, did not care about this either. He had no Ego problems. Jews took the responsibilities of God's 'Chosen People' seriously, but they were just mortal men, and so some of them took these more seriously than others. Thus, much of the Bible is devoted to the concerns of the prophets that the community was going astray, losing its resolve and dedication to the demanding mission for which it was chosen! In their argument with God (for it is God's choice that maddened these new believers), Muslim writers made great use of this Biblical, Jewish, self-criticism.

God was wrong to choose the Jews, they claimed, just like their Christian predecessors and contemporaries did in their belabouring of what was *verum Israel*, because the Jews were bad Jews, the worst possible Jews, while Muslims were the best Jews ever. Qur'an is outspoken on this. Moshe Perlmann summarises in his pathbreaking dissertation on Islamic antisemitism: In the Fatiha, the Qur'an's opening chapter (*surah*), 1:7 – incidentally included in each of the five daily prayers – Jews are the ones who earned Allah's anger. 'Forgetting the Divine Dispensation, the Jews transgressed Allah's commandments and flouted the prophets, and even slew them (3:181). . . . The believers [Muslims] will find that [the Jews] are their fiercest enemies (5:82) . . . 'Allah's book does not conceal how 'mimetic desire' among the Arabs turned into *ressentiment*: only *after* the Jews 'had rejected many friendly overtures (2:59; 5:81), it was decided that they must be fought against, made tributaries, and compelled to pay the poll-tax, as a mark of their humiliation (9:29)'. 'Therefore, many punishments fell upon them (2:61); . . . some of them were turned into apes for desecrating the sabbath (2:65; 7:166) . . . They became, in a way, the incarnation of evil'.¹²

In his comprehensive summary of Qur'anic pronouncements on the Jews, Saul S. Friedman stresses the Qur'anic criticism of Jews as bad, false Jews:

Sounding much like an ante-Nicean [*adversus Iudaeos*] polemic, the Qur'an contends that the Jews are a nation that has 'passed away' (Q. 2:134, 2:141). Twice God sent his instruments (the Assyrians [or Babylonians?] and Romans) to punish this perverse people (Q. 17:4–5), and their dispersal over the face of the earth (Q. 34:7; 59:3) is proof of his rejection (Q. 7:168). For the arrogant Jews who still claim to be His chosen people, the Qur'an instructs, 'Say: "You of Jewry, if you assert that you are the friends of God, apart from other men, then do you long for death, if you speak truly" (Q. 62:6)'. Jews, the Qur'an argued, sinned against Judaism because they were actually unbelievers and hypocrites (Q. 59:1). Apparently congenital liars, evildoers, and *hedonists* (all conclusions – and antisemitic tropes – shared with Christians but independently reached and developed), they intentionally perverted their own Scripture (Q. 2:75), 'taking words out of context', distorting the truth (Q. 4:45), and promoting 'monstrous falsehoods' (Q. 4:156). But while it took Christian theology about a thousand years to move to the paradigm of intentionality from considering the Jews simply incapable of interpreting their Bible correctly, the Qur'an used the two criticisms interchangeably. Q. 2:89, for instance, characterized the Jews as 'illiterate, senseless people'. Perhaps combining the two claims, Q. 3:24 asserted that they were 'deceived by their own lies'.

A terrible punishment awaited the Jews for the crime of not being true to their Jewishness, not the Jews they were expected to be, not the model. 'They are the heirs of Hell', it was declared in Q. 58: 14–19, 'and there they shall abide forever . . . Satan has gained possession of them and caused them to forget Allah's warning. They are the confederates of Satan; Satan's confederates assuredly will be lost'. This bore repeating again and again and was: They will 'burn in the hellfire' (Q. 4:45); 'Cursed by God, their faces will be

obliterated (Q. 4:47; indeed, it was already predicted that 'they will be made into apes' Q. 2:65); they were 'among devil's minions' (Q. 4:60); they 'shall burn forever in the fire of Hell. They are the vilest of all creatures' (Q. 98:7).¹³

Just like Christian theologians, Islamic writers project their own envy of the Jews on the Jews, though, similarly to arrogance and haughtiness, envy cannot be deduced from the religious context of the original monotheism, i.e. it does not make sense in the context of Judaism. Here is, for instance, a telling example from the 9th century's al-Jahiz, who, in a commissioned anti-Christian polemic, explains why Muslim masses hate Jews and don't hate Christians. First reason, he says, is the 'rancorous' relationship between the Muhammad's own community of exiles from Mecca received by Jews of Medina and these Jews:

When the [Muslim] Emigrants [from Mecca] became the neighbours of the Jews [in Medina] . . . the Jews began to envy the Muslims the blessings of their new faith, and the union which resulted after dissention. They proceeded to undermine the belief of our [Muslim] masses and to lead them astray. They aided our enemies and those envious of us. From mere misleading speech and stinging words they plunged into an open declaration of enmity, so that the Muslims mobilized their forces, exerting themselves morally and materially to banish the Jews and destroy them. Their strife became long-drawn and widespread, so that it worked itself up into a rage, and created yet greater animosity and more intensified rancour. The Christians, however, because of their remoteness from Mecca and Medina, did not have to put up with religious controversies, and did not have occasion to stir up trouble, and be involved in war. That was the first cause of our dislike of the Jews, and our partiality toward the Christians.¹⁴

It is significant that the 'rancour' al-Jahiz mentioned was entirely on the Muslim side. According to the *siras* of Ibn Ishaq and others, it was enough for the Jews to be unimpressed and remain satisfied with their original covenant (which implies they did not envy the Muslims the blessings of their new faith) for the Muslims, beginning with the prophet, to work themselves up into a rage and start butchering Jews. Muhammad personally, it is reported by his biographers, beheaded every male above 13 (600 to 900 people) of the Qurayza tribe and divided their women (taking one for himself), younger children, and property among his companions. The tribe was eliminated. Other Jewish tribes escaped mass slaughter, but were either enslaved or exiled. Arabia became *Judenrein* already in the 7th century after centuries of peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arab polytheists.

It is also significant that, despite actual war and competition for converts between the two powerful empires, the Muslim and the Christian, these communities, in so many respects equal, failed to work each other into a rage. There was no hatred between Muslims and Christians until at least the Crusades, and even then, locked in a struggle for domination, the two

borrowed monotheisms remained largely indifferent to each other. In the 13th century the Spanish Dominican, Raymond Martini, in his *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Iudaeos*, insisted very much like the Muslim writers of the day, that because the Jews were traitors to Judaism (i.e. bad Jews), they were the true faith's – in this case, Christianity's – most dangerous enemy.¹⁵ In accordance with the intentionality argument, he maintained that it was the Jews' 'envy, depravity, and guile' that was at the root of the problem – precisely the diagnosis of Martini's Muslim colleagues. No such mean qualities were attributed by the in-point-of-fact rival religions to each other. They did not touch each other emotionally, there was no need for venom.

The experience of existential envy is humiliating. Envy is necessarily experienced as inferiority. To alleviate this experience one must prove one's superiority vis-à-vis the model in comparison with which one feels inferior. The easiest way is to prove the inferiority of that other, to represent the other, convincingly to oneself, as actually inferior. The optimal way is to demonstrate performative superiority, i.e. to impose an inferior status on the other. Thus, the centrality of *the humiliation of the Jews* in both theory and practice in both Christianity and Islam.

The Jews, says the Qur'an (2:61), 'had humiliation and wretchedness . . . stamped upon them and they were visited with wrath from Allah. That was because they disbelieved in Allah's revelations and slew the prophets wrongfully. That was for their disobedience and transgressions'. Q.3:112 repeats Allah's curse of 'permanent humiliation [abasement]' for the same reasons. Q. 9:29 enjoins the faithful: 'Fight [the Jews] until they give the jizya willingly while they are humbled'. Jizya – the Qur'anic poll-tax imposed on the dhimmi people, which Jews had to pay, in lieu of being slain,¹⁶ was extracted in a ritual the very purpose of which was humiliation. The renowned writer Ibn Kathir explained in the 14th century:

Allah commanded the faithful to fight (kill) the unbelievers 'until they pay the Jizya', if they don't choose to embrace Islam, 'with willing submission', in defeat and subservience, 'and feel themselves subdued', disgraced, humiliated and belittled. Therefore, Muslims are not allowed to honour the people of Dhimma or elevate them above Muslims, for they are miserable, disgraced, and humiliated.¹⁷

Forcing Jews in particular to pay the tax 'readily', while being 'brought low' was also consistent with their overall humiliation and abasement indicated in Q. 2:61. In the mind of the believers, a Jew deserving respect was inconceivable, in fact a sacrilege. Wielding any kind of authority by a Jew was by definition a humiliation for the Muslims, it was 'deadly dominion' – *Nakba* this would be called after 1948¹⁸ – and it provoked wild rage.

Actually referred to as 'Jewish domination', Jewish *deadly dominion* was feared by Muslims, whose superiority over the Jews was only performative

and concealed the forever stirring sense of inferiority. It was by its nature deadly – literally, for the Jews. Episodes of antisemitic violence provoked by violations of the *dhimmis*, in which communities were destroyed, thousands murdered, women raped, property looted, have occurred with depressing regularity and frequency throughout the Islamic world. It is, therefore, highly dubious that in the late 19th and 20th centuries the experienced Jew-haters from it could learn anything new from their counterparts in Europe. Such perfect affinity existed between these varieties of antisemitism to begin with that this precluded any need for – or possibility of – influence.

Conclusion

The new name of Jew-hatred, *antisemitism*, signified the nationalisation of the old way of thinking and acting. Seamlessly, with all the tropes retained, religious Jew-hatred acquired the national/racial dimension, religious existential envy became also national/racial existential envy, and sense of religious inferiority was compounded by the sense of national/racial inferiority. Nationalism secularised the thinking within monotheistic societies in the sense of focusing it on this world. It reduced the significance of the transcendental in everyday life and made the collective aspects of the everyday (politics, in particular) the sphere of the sacred. Turned political with nationalism, antisemitism found welcome on the left as well as on the right; it was at home, therefore, everywhere in the modern politics. There it was reinforced by the envy of Jewish achievement in modern societies.

Antisemitism is a built-in, inherent, central and defining strand of the existential make-up of the monotheistic civilisation and remains as important an excitant for thinking and acting today as it was in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, when it spurred on theological cogitations which created tropes that lodged themselves in the consciousness of the masses. Now, it galvanises politics. Antisemitism is common to all the constituent parts of this civilisation, uniting Christianity and Islam, otherwise opposed to each other, rival denominations of Christianity and conflicting interpretations of Islam, and, upon secularisation, the contradictory, left and right, political persuasions.

In the Holocaust this civilisation committed the horrific crime of parricide. The guilt was profound and widespread. But, in the attempt to cope with it, it allowed this patently antisemitic atrocity to be misrepresented and covered up as a paradigmatic example of the imaginary tendency of ‘natural xenophobia’ – what humans do to other humans. The world was divided into the humans likely to be naturally xenophobic, in whose evil company Jews were before long included, and the ‘other humans’ who were imagined and rapidly came to imagine themselves as the natural victims of xenophobia. So divided, the monotheistic

civilisation proceeded to shred itself into pieces in a mad, unnecessary internecine war of all against all. Built on the foundations of Judaism, it is now being undone because of its unrepentant antisemitism. We must focus on surviving it.

Notes

1. Greenfeld, *Nationalism*.
2. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*.
3. Greenfeld, "The Rise of China and the Concept of Civilisation."
4. Vinzent, "Christianity," 473–89.
5. Fredriksen, "Jewish Romans, Christian Romans," 23–53.
6. Cohen, "The Jews," 1–27; the discussion of the transformation of the "ignorance" tradition into one of "intentionality" relies on this text and all the respective quotations are from it.
7. Roth quoted in Cohen, "The Jews," 1.
8. My discussion of Islamic authorities, unless otherwise indicated, relies on Andrew G. Bostom's magisterial compilation, *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism*.
9. Firestone, "Chosenness and the Exclusivity of Truth," 107–28.
10. Bostom, "Author's Updated Preface (AUP)," xxxiv.
11. Allameh Tabatabai and Tantawi, in *Ibid.*, vii.
12. Pearlman, in *Ibid.*, iii.
13. Friedman, in Bostom, *The Legacy*, 40–41.
14. Al-Jahiz, in Bostom, "Author's Updated Preface (AUP)," viii.
15. Raymond Martini discussed in Cohen, "The Jews," 26–7.
16. Bostom, "Author's Updated Preface (AUP)," x.
17. Ibn Kathir, in Bostom, *The Legacy*, 42.
18. Abubakr, "The Perennial Power of the Nakba."

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