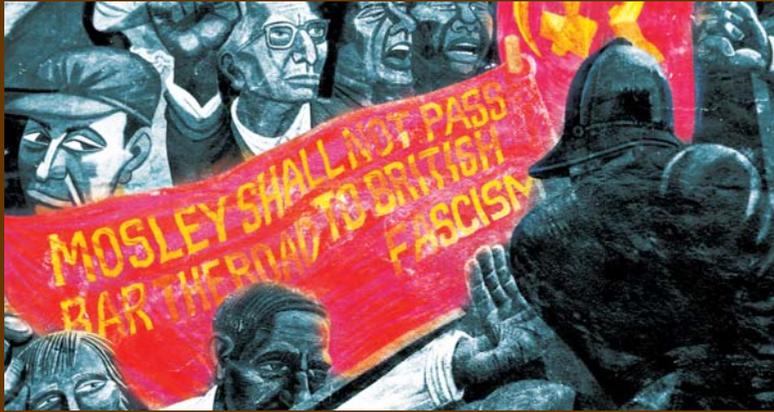


VOLUME 4
EDITION 7
WINTER 2010
ISSN 1756-7335

ARCHES

QUARTERLY



ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTI-MUSLIM HATRED: CAUSES & REMEDIES



مؤسسة قرطبة
The Cordoba Foundation
Cultures in Dialogue.

THIS ISSUE
Volume 4 • Edition 7
Winter 2010
ISSN 1756-7335
Available online:
thecordobafoundation.com



Arches Quarterly is published by



مؤسسة قرطبة
The Cordoba Foundation

Westgate House, Level 7, Westgate Road, Ealing, London W5 1YY
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Submissions of articles and reports for Arches Quarterly should be made by e-mail, in Word format, to the editors: publications@thecordobafoundation.com

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Cover image: a segment of The Battle of Cable Street Mural in Muslim-concentrated Shadwell neighbourhood in East London, which was created by artist Dave Binnington. The mural stands as a powerful symbolic reminder of anti-fascism in the East End. On 4th October 1936, local people stopped Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists marching through Cable Street, then a mainly Jewish area. A slogan from the Spanish Civil War, a popular anti-fascist cause of the time, was widely used: "They Shall Not Pass - No Pasaran!"

In June 2010, people of all faiths and none, unions and civil rights groups, young and old, marched passed Cable Street in a powerful stand against the racist, anti-Muslim English Defence League (EDL) who threatened to attack The East London Mosque, and create tensions in the community. The coalition, United East End, claimed this was the first time the EDL have been forced to call off a planned demonstration in the area.



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Islamophobia & Anti-Semitism: History and Possibility

*RABBI REUVEN FIRESTONE

ISLAMOPHOBIA and anti-Semitism have much in common though they arose from nearly opposite historical circumstances. Both are expressions of racism. Both refer to irrational fears directed toward a specific human group. Both are deeply embedded into the very fabric of Western culture and society. And ironically, Muslims and Jews tend to be guilty of these prejudices against the other. To be precise, many Jews are Islamophobic and many Muslims are anti-Semitic, even while they share the role of being on the receiving end of a similar set of prejudices. But even sadder is the fact that both prejudices are so deeply ingrained in Western society that it is unlikely they will ever be completely eradicated.

TERMINOLOGICAL ORIGINS

Islamophobia and anti-Semitism developed largely for different reasons and are unrelated historically. The term, “anti-Semitism,” was actually coined only in the nineteenth century. That does not mean that racist hatred of Jews did not exist before then, but the term “Semite” was unknown until it was invented by German linguists in the nineteenth century working on identifying language families and examining their relationship. They discovered that the language groups we now call Latin, Germanic and Slavic were related to Persian and Hindi through a distant, theoretical antecedent they called an *Ursprache*, an ancestor tongue. The theoretical *Ursprache* for these languages is now referred to as “Proto-Indo-European.” Their sleuthing also revealed that certain collections of languages outside of the Proto-Indo-European group seemed to have their own extended family of tongues. One set of these is made up of Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac and some long-dead languages such as Akkadian and South Arabian. These they called “Semitic” languages because the lands in which they were spoken seemed to correspond

with the national communities listed as the “sons of Shem,” Noah’s oldest son whose family line is recorded in Genesis chapter 10.¹ The linguists were classifying language communities – not racial communities. But since the most obvious and only “Semitic” language actually employed in Europe was Hebrew used by the Jews, Semite and Jew were easily associated.

Jews in much of Western Europe had been freed from the ghetto and invited to participate equally in European society in the nineteenth century for the first time since the period of the Roman Empire. Some Gentiles, however, were staunchly against integration of Jews into the larger society. A German journalist named Wilhelm Marr wrote an article in 1880 attacking Jews for refusing to discard all aspects of their prior identity as they joined the mainstream of Europe. The article’s title was “The Way to Victory of the Germanic Spirit over the Jewish Spirit.” That same year he founded a German organisation committed specifically to combat Jewish engagement in German culture and to forcibly expel Jews from the country. The name of the organisation was *Antisemiten-Liga* – “League of anti-Semites”. As it later became clear, the name was simply a pseudo-scientific label, meaning “Association of Jew-Haters”.

Islamophobia is an even newer term than anti-Semitism. It begins to appear only in the 1980s, but became common after 9/11. In 2004, president of the United Nations Kofi Annan had the following to say about Islamophobia at a UN meeting in New York: “[W]hen the world is compelled to coin a new term to take account of increasingly widespread bigotry, that is a sad and troubling development. Such is the case with Islamophobia”.

A 2007 article in *Journal of Sociology* defines Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism and a continuation of anti-Asian and anti-Arab

Islamophobia... refers to a long history of fear and hatred of Muslims in the West that, like anti-Semitism, has had a long time to become implanted into the collective Western psyche.

racism. And here is another parallel with anti-Semitism.² Although Islamophobia is a recently coined term, it refers to a long history of fear and hatred of Muslims in the West that, like anti-Semitism, has had a long time to become implanted into the collective Western psyche.

ANCIENT ROOTS OF PREJUDICE

Anti-Semitism has had a very long time to incubate. It developed gradually over many centuries, first as a simple prejudice that was nothing more than an expression of one civilisation's superiority over another. We can find the first writings expressing antipathy toward Jews and Judaism among the Greeks. The earliest writers, around 300 BCE, (the philosophers, Theophrastus, Megasthenes, Clearchus of Soli) actually considered the Jews a nation of philosophers and were quite positive.³ But later, when the Jews living in Judea fought back against Greek attempts to take over their lands and impose their culture, references became increasingly negative.

Like all peoples, the Greeks denigrated their enemies. In fact, however, Greek descriptions of Jews were not much different than their descriptions of other foreign peoples. They were all unfavorable, one way or another.

All human communities tend to consider themselves superior to other communities. In fact, there is a tendency within any human group, defined in virtually any way – sports teams, for example – to define itself as superior to all others. And when it is difficult to identify traits that set one's group apart from the rest, negative traits are created in what Freud called "the narcissism of minor differences".⁴

Group "othering" has been studied by evolutionary biologists as a basic and

instinctual behavior. It may have developed in order to ensure group survival when competing against other human groups for scarce resources. Tribal groups compete for scarce pasturage, kinship groups compete for geographical features that offer protection, and ethnic groups compete over fertile hunting areas. Any way in which human groups identify as groups bases that identity on the fact that there are other people who are identified as being *outside* the group. Those outside the group are inevitably defined as inferior.

Another worldwide phenomenon is scapegoating. Many hypotheses have been proffered to explain why human communities always seem to identify certain weaker persons or groups and treat them as scapegoats, and it seems to be a near-universal act.⁵ Minority communities, partially simply because they are numerically weaker in relation to the majority, are typically scapegoated. One need not look far to observe the phenomenon in social settings ranging from the classroom to the nation-state. Consider, for example, your own personal experience and observations, especially among children who have not yet learned to hide or rationalise their emotions. Who has not witnessed (or perpetrated) the act of picking on certain groups or individuals identified as weak or odd within a group?

Prejudice is normal. Not to be endorsed, to be sure, but common – and likely to be a natural product of human evolution. So also, it would appear, is the habit of choosing a "fall guy" to pick on. Anti-Semitism is a special term used specifically for prejudice against Jews and for scapegoating them as individuals or a community. It seems odd at first sight that there is a special word for this in relation to Jews. Why don't we have "anti-Irishism" or "anti-Japanism?"

There is an answer for this. Prejudice toward Jews became more acute than other expressions of prejudice. It became idiomatic within Western culture – so "normal" that Western civilisation now honors it with its own designation. The reason for this is not cosmic or theological. It is not because of the false myth that Jews had or still have secret control or inordinate power, or that they are hateful of others or have a natural antipathy

toward civilisation. Many other minority groups in history were assumed to have similar inexplicable advantages or misanthropic attitudes that aroused resentment, fear and hatred. Such fantasies are part of the psychology behind scapegoating and the rationalisation of bigotry. The reason that prejudice reached such a level in relation to Jews and persisted for so long is due simply to the long history and prolonged minority status of the Jewish people. Unlike most other minority groups that either disappeared or later had their own turn to dominate, Jews remained a distinct minority for thousands of years and within many cultures and civilisations. They therefore naturally accumulated numerous negative stereotypes over a very long period of time.

Most minority groups do not remain minorities for more than a few generations. They are either destroyed, assimilate into the majority, or eventually become the dominant group and lose their minority status. If they disappear or assimilate into the majority they lose their distinct status. When that occurs, the negative stereotypes and prejudice directed against them have no more purpose, so they fade away or are applied to a new group that takes their place. If the minority group becomes dominant it neutralises the stereotypes and prejudice or suppresses them. When that occurs, they either die out or are purposefully removed from the historical record when the group becomes ascendant. It is the winners, after all, who write history.

Because Jews survived as minority communities for so many centuries, the negative portrayals by the early Greeks never disappeared. They were read, commented on, and added to by later Greeks and then pagan Romans. With the Christianisation of the Roman Empire the old negativity was picked up and then augmented by Greek and

Latin Christians writers, and then medieval Europeans, and then modern atheist racial elitists. At each level, negative depictions were added or intensified, so over the generations and centuries the volume and distribution of anti-Jewish writings, sermons, speeches and discussions grew. The result was a notion ever more deeply rooted into Western culture and society that the Jews were different, somehow less civilised or even evil.

Anti-Semitic messages are embedded in some of the most inspiring and popular expressions of Western literature. Shakespeare incorporated repulsive anti-Jewish stereotypes in his *Shylock*, for example, though no Jews had lived in England for centuries and it is unlikely that he ever met a Jew. Anti-Jewish messages appear not only in literature and poetry such as Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, but also in the plastic arts. In medieval Europe Jews are portrayed in sculptures and frescos as deformed and diseased, in wood-cuts as scheming to torture the Holy Communion wafer so they could replay their role in the agony of Christ, and in stained-glass church windows as draining or even sucking out the blood of innocent Christian children.

Illiterate church-goers would naturally absorb the fantasy of Jewish evil from sermons, liturgical readings and simply from seeing the art decorating their places of worship. Not only are anti-Jewish messages found in the visual arts but also in music, including folk music and children's songs. Folktales include depictions of evil Jews who, like witches, will spirit children away and kill them. When Jews were shunted aside into ghettos and removed from the natural social interaction that would prove their humanity, it was natural for the fantasies to take over.⁶

So today, fear, repulsion, and even hatred of Jews have become a basic part of Western civilisation. So deep is it ingrained in the Western psyche that many who have no anger or resentment toward Jews nevertheless accept strange anti-Semitic notions as simple reality. When my wife was an undergraduate at Yale University in the 1970s, one of the most elite universities in the world, she was shocked when a *phi beta kappa* English honors student politely asked her why Jews used the blood of Christian children for religious ritual.

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When life is good, the economy is strong and people are optimistic, the deeply rooted anti-Semitism of Western civilisation remains latent. It is there, fixed in the most foundational aspects of culture, but not necessarily sensed in any conscious way, let alone acknowledged. Sometime it is expressed through jokes, side comments or unrecognised idiomatic phrases, but not through violence. But when life becomes difficult and people's hopes and dreams are frustrated, when there is a need to blow off steam or find scapegoats for serious disappointment and aggravation, the latent anti-Semitism becomes activated. Ancient slanders are re-discovered, old writings and complaints are renewed and stereotyped images revived. The result is the restoration of an old prejudice in new clothes, and the results can be tragic.

ROOTS OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

The origin of Islamophobia has some overlap with the origin of anti-Semitism. Like anti-Semitism, prejudice against Muslims derives from the core reality that humans identify with groups and tend to demean those outside their core identity group. As Prophet Muhammad began to attract people to his message in seventh century Arabia, his followers disassociated with the established religious communities, which naturally invited resistance. The establishment opposed them and branded them as deviants. Islamophobia has that in common with anti-Semitism and with prejudice against every new religious or sectarian movement, all of which are opposed by religious establishments. The new Muslim community was threatening to establishment groups in Arabia simply by virtue of being different, and difference tends to be disconcerting and arouses fear.

Aside from this basic parallel, anti-Semitism

and Islamophobia move in different directions and their histories, which intertwined, differ considerably. The major cause of Islamophobia is not a history of weakness and minority survival as is anti-Semitism, but rather a history of tremendous success, productivity and development.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the roots of Islamophobia were established centuries before the religion of Islam ever came into existence. The story begins with the well-known tension between Jews and Christians during the first centuries of the Common Era when they disputed with one another over which expression of monotheism was the true expression of God's will. Each argued, of course, that the other's was false.

This was not simply an intellectual exercise. A lot was at stake. Hundreds of thousands, and perhaps even millions of Greco-Roman pagans had become disaffected with their own traditional religion by the first century B.C.E. The great Greco-Roman myths of bickering gods involved in acts of deception, intrigue and immoral behaviors may have been entertaining, but they were not spiritually enlightening and hardly ethically edifying. Greeks and Romans were seeking more fulfilling religious identity with meaningful prayer, personal introspection, and moral-ethical guidance. They first became attracted to Judaism, and after the emergence of Christianity they became attracted to it as well. They began to join both Judaism and Christianity, and many individuals actually did exactly that: they joined *both* communities. The fourth century Church Father, John Chrysostom, was infuriated when he learned that the parishioners who attended his church on the Christian Sabbath had just attended synagogue the day before on the Jewish Sabbath.⁷

That caused increasing friction between Jews and Christians, and especially their religious leaders. The competition and argument began long before Chrysostom and went on for centuries, often at the same time that the leadership of the pagan Roman Empire was viciously persecuting both religions.⁸

Rome was wealthy, powerful, and preoccupied with maintaining an empire. Why would Roman authorities care enough

about Jews and Christians to persecute them? The simple reason is that both monotheistic religions posed a real threat to the power and authority of Rome. At the time, the Roman religion was the official religion of the empire, and making sacrifices to the Roman gods on behalf of the emperor was the recognised and obligatory statement of civic loyalty. This, of course, Jews and Christians refused to do. Eventually Roman subjects were obligated to make sacrifices *to* the emperor – which of course no Jew or Christian would ever perform.

At the same time that intense pressure was being placed on Jews and Christians to conform to paganism, large numbers of pagans were leaving their old religion and joining Jewish and Christian communities. More ended up joining the Christians because Christianity was more appealing to Greco-Romans than Judaism, but both communities grew substantially and drained ever more support away from the Roman imperial religious establishment and its associated political authority.

After centuries of tension and argument, the Christians “won” the competition with the Jews. The prize was the Roman Empire itself. In the fourth century, Emperor Constantine declared Christianity a legal religion, and within a generation it became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

This was considered by Christians to be a divine miracle, and it is understandable why they would think so. Not long before, under Constantine’s predecessor Diocletian, Christians had suffered their worst persecution ever as thousands and perhaps tens of thousands were cruelly executed for refusing to make offerings to the gods. Many were thrown to wild beasts in the arenas and stadiums in what was called *damnatio ad bestia*, where typically, lions or other wild animals would tear them apart. Only a few short years later Christianity was legalised – and then became the new imperial religion.

It made sense to describe this sea-change as a divinely-wrought miracle – and not only a miracle for Christians, but also a lesson to Jews. Christians naturally concluded that their success was proof of God’s unmitigated approval of Christianity as the one true faith

– the only true expression of the divine will. Why would the evil pagan Roman Empire become Christian if it was not God’s will? How else to explain such a wonder? History was considered God’s proof to the world of the truth of Christ, that Jesus is the son of God, that the Trinitarian nature of God is true, and that only those who accept these truths will be saved.

What does this have to do with Islamophobia? A lot, it turns out. The Christianisation of the Empire was taken by Church leaders and theologians as proof that history confirms theology, that historical success proves theological truth. A few centuries later, this same logic would be utilised by Muslims to prove that God actually favored Islam. How else to explain the extraordinary conquest by the Arab Muslims in the seventh century? Within twenty years of the death of Prophet Muhammad, Muslim armies controlled the Middle East and much of North Africa. After only two more generations the Muslim empire stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to India while the Christian emperors were forced into a rump empire confined to Anatolia and a few provinces west of the Bosphorus.

The success of the conquest was an existential shock to the Christian world. It defied what had become a theological given: that history had proven the truth of Christianity and Christian supremacy. Suddenly, this assumption was being challenged by the Muslims. How else could a force of uncivilised desert hordes succeed in defeating Byzantium and completely dismantle the great Persian Empire, the two greatest empires on earth?

Christian apologists of course explained Islam’s victory and Christianity’s defeat differently. One of the earliest explanations was given by an eighth century Byzantine monk named Theophanes who wrote a famous chronicle of the Christian Empire. He explained that Muhammad was a fraud, a poor but clever epileptic who rationalised his convulsive fits as periods in which the angel Gabriel would visit him and give him divine wisdom. Such visitations proved he was a prophet, Muhammad claimed, and his cleverness convinced many people to follow him. According to Theophanes, some Jews joined him as well, and fed him misinformation

and hatred toward Christians.⁹

The negative claims intensified. Islam's extraordinary success was eventually explained as the work of Satan. Riccolodo da Monte di Croce, an Italian Dominican monk living in the 13th century wrote that Muhammad was chosen not by God but by the devil. Archbishop William of Tyre, who grew up in twelfth century Crusader Jerusalem, characterised the prophet as "first-born of Satan who seduced the Orient with his pestilent doctrine." Peter of Toledo, part of a team living in 12th century Spain that made the first translation of the Qur'an into Latin, considered the religion of Islam to be a result of satanic plotting.

According to these medieval thinkers, the so-called prophet who inspired his warriors to overwhelm the forces of Christ must be a satanic force working for the demons of hell. Muhammad could not possibly be a true prophet, but rather an impostor, a fraud. His scripture could not possibly be divine revelation, but merely a creation of an evil spirit, or at best, a human deception with no spiritual value.¹⁰

Jews did not have the same perspective because they had no political power or prestige to be crushed by the success of the Conquest. In fact, the Jews initially rejoiced that the source of much of their torment under Christian rule was overwhelmed by an army of monotheists whom they considered to be more like themselves. Some Jews even thought that the armies were harbingers of their own messiah, and we have some contemporary Hebrew texts that actually state this outright. One tells a story about the second century Jewish sage and mystic named Shimon bar Yochai whose enormous mystical power enabled him to converse with angels. The narrative is speculative and, as is common in such texts, includes a kind of code that would be understood by Jewish readers but not necessarily by others. In medieval Jewish sources, the biblical nation of Edom, which derived from Jacob's twin brother and enemy Esau according to the genealogies in Genesis 36, represents Christians and Christianity, while Ishmael represents Muslims and Islam.

"When [Shimon bar Yochai] saw the kingdom of Ishmael that was coming, he

began to say: 'Was it not enough, what the wicked kingdom of Edom did to us, but we must have the kingdom of Ishmael too?' At once, Metatron the prince of the [divine] countenance answered and said, 'Do not fear, son of man, for the Holy One only brings the kingdom of Ishmael in order to save you from this wickedness. He raises up over them a prophet according to his will and will conquer the land for them and they will come and restore it in greatness, and there will be great terror between them and the sons of Esau..... when he, the rider on the camel, goes forth the kingdom will arise through the rider on a donkey.'¹¹

The rider on the camel in this narrative is Muhammad, who according to this text will presage the arrival of the Jewish messiah riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zecharia 9:9). Of course, the Muslim conquest did not bring the Jewish messiah, and Jews were disappointed at their second-class status under Islam when it became a world empire and reserved citizenship with full privileges to Muslims only. But most did recognise that their treatment under Muslims was a significant improvement, on the whole, over life under Christian rule.

The Christian reaction to the great success of Islam, on the other hand, was to harbor a deep fear and resentment that became imbedded in the Christian self-concept and view of the Muslim "other." This is Islamophobia, even if no special word had yet been coined to describe the sentiment. It was articulated in theological treatises and tracts and, like

Like anti-Semitism, Islamophobia became deeply embedded in Western civilisation through theological argument, folklore, art, music, and literature.

Christianity's general perspective on Jews and Judaism, eventually it was infused into the very culture of Christendom. Like anti-Semitism, Islamophobia became deeply

embedded in Western civilisation through theological argument, folklore, art, music, and literature. This is not a wild accusation but an observation that is now becoming an issue of serious scholarly interest. Recently, the prestigious German Max Planck Institute in Florence organised a research conference to study the varied ways in which the Prophet Muhammad has been constructed and imagined through European eyes.¹² The resentment and distrust of Islam that has become so deeply infused into Western culture helped fuel the violent attitudes that resulted in the Crusades, the Spanish *reconquista*, and the expulsion of Muslims from Spain, Eastern Europe, and Southern Italy in the high and late Middle Ages.

Like anti-Semitism, Islamophobia can remain in “latent” form until it is triggered by economic, political or social stress. Islamophobia in the West has been activated in the last decades by economic and social problems and the increase in visibility of Western Muslims due to immigration, especially since the 1960s. Its biggest boost has been the appalling deadly attacks by Muslim extremists against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the US, the lethal bombings in London and Madrid, and the nature of reaction by key Western leaders to these events. These heinous acts, though extraordinarily shocking and horrific, are not the cause of Islamophobia. They are the most recent trigger.

ISLAMOPHOBIC JEWS AND ANTISEMITIC MUSLIMS

The foregoing analysis has treated the phenomenon of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Western societies that have emerged under the influence of Christianity. This does not relieve Jews or Muslims of their own prejudices and mistreatment of other groups, including Jewish antipathy toward Muslims and Muslim antipathy toward Jews. A number of factors have contributed to tension and even hostility between these two communities even as they have historically been singled out, and often together, for opprobrium in Western society.¹³ These include the phenomenon mentioned above regarding group self-definition, which

eventually and inevitably includes a hierarchy of relationship that privileges the in-group and denigrates others.

Another factor is the problem, also mentioned above, that new and emerging religions always suffer from the belligerence of establishment religions that inevitably consider them threatening. Because new religions typically record their resentment toward the establishment religions that opposed them in sacred texts, they retain ambivalence or even animosity toward establishment religions long after the original conflict has passed. This is the primary historical reason, for example, for the negative portrayals of Jews and pagan Romans in early Christian literatures, and for the negative portrayals of Jews and Christians and polytheist Arabs in early Islamic literature. Once the negative representation becomes established in sacred text it becomes embedded in the religious culture and is therefore mechanically and automatically conveyed to every new generation of believers.

A third factor behind current tensions between Jews and Muslims is the conflict raging in Israel/Palestine. This situation is one in which each of two competing expressions of modern nationalism believes that it has exclusive right to the same national territory. The core issue in the conflict is competing nationalisms and not religion, which is immediately apparent if one examines the history of the first three generations of activists and actions on both sides of that political divide. Only since the 1970s has the conflict been defined increasingly in religious terms, but the change in viewpoint has negatively affected Jewish and Muslim views of the other in most parts of the world.

While all these issues are important for untangling and improving the complex relationship between Muslims and Jews, I am concerned here with a fourth factor: the internalisation of majority prejudice within a minority community. This comes in two forms. One is called “ethnic self-hatred,” which is turning majority prejudice on one’s own self and community. It should not be surprising to learn that antipathy in the dominant culture is picked up and internalised by the very communities that suffer from the prejudice. Some Jews and Muslims thus

internalise antagonism directed against their communities, which can result in negative self-esteem and behaviors.¹⁴

Like other minorities, Jews and Muslims also internalise prejudice directed against other identified minorities that derive from the larger environment. While no formal studies of Jewish and Muslim views toward the other have been conducted to date, anecdotal evidence suggests a very substantial rise in Jewish antipathy toward Muslims in the past two decades.¹⁵ As noted above, Jews historically have had significantly less antipathy toward Islam than Christians. This can be explained by the factors mentioned above, namely that Jews were not threatened by the success of Islam as were Christians because the authority and value of Judaism were not based on historical domination or influence during the period of Islamic historical emergence.

Secondly, Islam did not exist as an organised religion during the emergence of Judaism, so the natural antipathy directed toward established religions was never directed against Islam (or Christianity). It was, rather, directed against the establishment religions of the ancient Near East, namely, Canaanite polytheism.¹⁶ The rise in Jewish fear and hostility directed against Muslims must therefore be explained by other means. The two most important factors would appear to be the “religionisation” of the struggle of competing nationalisms in Israel/Palestine and Jewish assimilation of and participation in the steep rise in Christian/Western cultural prejudice and Islamophobia.

Anecdotal evidence would suggest a recent rise in anti-Semitism among Muslims as well.¹⁷ The rise of Western-styled anti-Semitism in the Muslim world has been addressed elsewhere and need not occupy us here in detail.¹⁸ It must suffice here to note how colonial influence in the Muslim world by Western powers included the introduction of Christian anti-Semitism, which influenced Muslim attitudes toward indigenous Jews living in the Muslim world. One famous indication of the change in attitudes among Muslims is the famous Damascus Blood Libel of 1840, which occurred more than a generation before the rise of Zionism as a national movement

among Jews.¹⁹

Anti-Semitism among Arabs has caused some confusion because of the racial-linguistic association with the term. Some Arabs have claimed that by definition, they cannot be anti-Semites because they trace their ancient genealogy to a line also going back to Noah's son Shem. Because they are officially Semites, it is impossible for them to be anti-Semites. This is actually a spurious argument because anti-Semitism emerged as a term to describe the hatred of Jews specifically, and has rarely been applied to any other community. In any case, if an Arab or a Jew or anybody else hates somebody simply for being a member of a certain community, then that person is a racist. If the racism is directed against Jews, it is called anti-Semitism, no matter who the hating person is.²⁰

Islamic culture includes natural antipathy directed against Jews (as well as Christians and polytheists) that arose from the phenomena associated with the emergence of new religions discussed above. That antipathy is imbedded in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and most forms of traditional literature such as Tafsir and Hadith commentaries. But this aversion had neither the particular qualities nor the virulence of Christian antipathy toward Jews. The rise in anti-Semitism among Muslims is profoundly influenced by the Israel-Palestine conflict and by the increasing pressure of globalisation and recent Western military incursions into the Muslim world, but the nature of its rhetoric and caricatures indicates a direct relationship with anti-Semitic imagery and rhetoric directed against Jews in the West, and particularly in mid-20th century Europe. Current Muslim expressions of anti-Semitism quite clearly reflect the absorption of Western prejudice against Jews.

CONCLUSION

Muslims and Jews share the ignoble role of being singled out historically by the West as the archetypal “other”. Hated and feared for centuries, fantasies of Jewish and Muslim barbarity and evil are deeply embedded in Western culture and remain at all times a latent influence on the perceptions and perspectives of Westerners. Because Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have become a core component of

Western civilisation, it is unlikely that these prejudices can ever be totally eradicated. Nevertheless, much can and must be done to prevent their latency from becoming activated, and to counter these forms of racism when they are active. While this is not the specific topic of this essay, it is a subject requiring urgent exploration and research.

The causes of strife in this complex world are many. They must never be reduced to the essentialist and false excuse of religion or racialised communities. It is not Muslims and Islam, or Jews and Judaism that have caused the problems we face in this complex modern world any more than it is “gypsies” or “heretics.” Our current problems derive from a complex set of economic, social, political and other factors. The primitive, medieval explanation of reducing all the world’s ills to a single cause or community will resolve no conflict, establish no justice, and bring no peace or understanding.

Muslims and Jews share the similar role of outlier in the West. They have much in common and can benefit from mutual understanding and cooperation, and it will be of enormous benefit for all parties when Muslims and Jews can work together consistently and reliably. But working together requires that both communities take stock of their own prejudice against the other and work to resolve it. Only then can they join forces successfully with progressive and affirmative people of all types to collaborate in building a world based on cooperation, dignity, and respect for people of all creeds and backgrounds.

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Rabbi Firestone’s writings include *Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Judaism for Muslims; An Introduction to Islam for Jews; Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam; and Who are the Real Chosen People: The Meaning of “Chosenness” in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. He received his doctorate in Arabic and Islamic Studies from NYU.

ENDNOTES

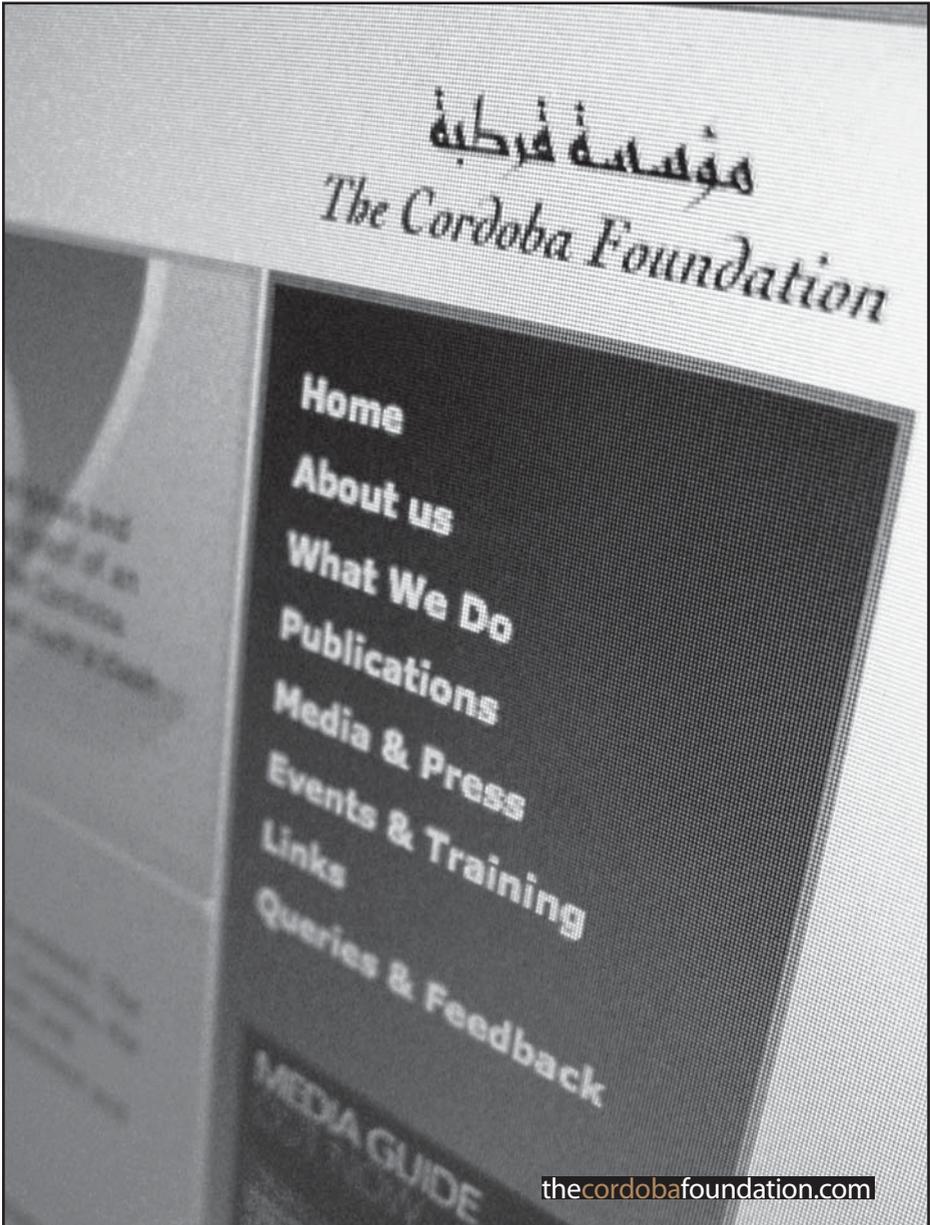
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14. See, for example, Cutler, Allan Harris and Cutler, Helen Elmquist (1986). *The Jew as Ally of the Muslim: Medieval Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press).
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16. The Pew Research Center, including its “Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life” and other polling agencies do not have data on the specific question of Jewish regard for Muslim and Muslim regard for Jews (personal correspondence with Alan Cooperman, Associate Director of Research for the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 29 November, 2010; and Steven M. Cohen, Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and Director of the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at New York University, 5 December, 2010. Cf. “Muslims Widely Seen As Facing Discrimination” (September 9, 2009) <http://pewforum.org/Muslim/Muslims-Widely-Seen-As-Facing-Discrimination.aspx>
17. *Op. cit.* Firestone, *Who are the Real Chosen People*, pp. 44-46.
18. As with the rise in Islamophobia among Jews, this has not been demonstrated through scientific studies.
19. International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies, 4:3

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20. In fact, as noted above, it is possible for Jews or any other minority to be "self-hating."





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