

# Antisemitism in Islam? - An Explanation and a Personal Story of History

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To get straight to the point: No, Islam is not fundamentally or inherently antisemitic! This fact does not change, even if the opposite is regularly and stereotypically repeated. In the Quran, Jews are referred to as "believers<sup>1</sup>" and the "People of the Book" multiple times, and they are considered "protected" by Muslims. This is different from Christianity, where Jews were referred to as "God killers" for centuries and were called to repent in religious ceremonies, such as the one on Good Friday, which was even reintroduced by a previous Catholic Pope.

## European Roots

The active and systematic antisemitism in Europe began with various crusades, whether in the East against Muslims in the homeland of the Jews, from which they were expelled by the Romans, or in the West against Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula. During the first Christian crusade, the connection between hatred for Islam and antisemitism became apparent, as this crusade, which was directed against Muslims, set the stage for the first pogrom against Jews in Germany<sup>2</sup>, followed by others. On the other hand, in Spain, after the so-called Reconquista, the Christian crusade against the Muslims, all Muslims and Jews had to flee. The new era, which from that moment on was also called the "modern era," began with the ethnic cleansing of the Iberian Peninsula of Muslims and Jews. Muslims crossed the Strait of Gibraltar into culturally connected Africa, while many Jews moved to the new Islamic empire, the Ottoman Empire. Yes, there were pogroms against Jews under the local rule of the Zirids<sup>3</sup> and under the short-lived radical Almoravids<sup>4</sup>, but these were not systemic before or after in Muslim Al-Andalus. They were more of singular events, each occurring in a different context, comparable to the goodwill of the Jews when the first Muslims conquered Spain and the Jewish population was happier with the new rulers compared to the Gothic kings before. The Muslims subsequently handed over the former royal city of Toledo to the Jews.

Islam was never directed against the Jews. On the contrary, the Quran references the efforts of the Prophet Muhammad to be accepted by the Jews as a prophet in their line of prophets. The fact that this acceptance did not happen did not lead to a destructive antisemitism but rather to the aforementioned status of being "protected." The only local conflicts with three out of the fourteen Jewish tribes living in Medina find mention in the Quran, and all critical mentions of Jews relate to these incidents or stories of previous events that were not connected to the time of the Quran. Negative reports about Jews from pre-Quranic times do

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<sup>1</sup> Example: Coran 2,62

<sup>2</sup> Pogrom of Mainz 1096 and the following in Rheinland

<sup>3</sup> Granada 1066

<sup>4</sup> Granada 1090

not show a general antisemitism; rather, Jews are used as a synonym for believers in general and are thus highly regarded. Negative aspects are reported to exemplify what happens when believers defy Allah, but this does not devalue Jews in general; it addresses the reported events and their protagonists. These events either occurred before the time of the Quran or were localized incidents in Medina during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, from which no general antisemitism can be derived. This consensus has prevailed over the centuries among Islamic scholars and their interpretations of these passages<sup>5</sup>.

As mentioned, the situation is different in Christianity, regardless of whether it's Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant, and the Lutheran antisemitic writings are well known. Christian antisemitism has shaped the lives of Jews in Europe for centuries. It was only in 1965 that the declaration "Nostra Aetate" formally ended the anti-Jewish perspective of the Catholic Church. In the 19th century, Christian antisemitism secularized itself, first into the Christian Social Parties and then into the unchristian National Socialism, which merely formally imitated Christianity. On the other hand, Jews or individuals of Jewish descent became leading figures in the new leftist parties in Germany, Austria, or Russia<sup>6</sup>, which fueled the antisemitism of conservatives and reactionaries.

The project of Israel in the former Ottoman and later British-occupied Palestine might not have happened without the Holocaust, as is widely believed. However, Theodor Herzl from Vienna had already called for a Jewish state almost 100 years earlier, simply because the life of Jews, regardless of where they were in Christian Europe, had become intolerable. Pogroms had been part of their daily lives for centuries<sup>7</sup>. With the growing dominance of European colonial policies and the influence of nationalist ideologies, new tensions emerged in the Middle East<sup>8</sup>, where Jews and Muslims had previously lived peacefully together. The Holocaust was undoubtedly a catalyst for the idea of establishing a Jewish state, and it was expedited to soothe Europe's centuries-old guilty conscience. However, it also imposed a conflict on the local Palestinians, who had little to do with it. In practical terms, they became the ones blamed for Jew-hatred and antisemitism. Europe found a way to direct the hatred it previously harbored against Jews toward Muslims, who compensated for the population loss caused by the extermination of Jews in Central Europe through immigration. To this day, the same sentences, images, and hatred used against Jews in the past are now used against Muslims on a massive scale<sup>9</sup>. Right-wing political groups increasingly do this openly and cynically under the guise of being "supporters of Israel," allowing them to maintain their racism against Muslims that was previously directed at Jews. Less radical parties, such as "bourgeois" or "social democratic" ones, essentially do the same, partly because it can overshadow the lack of a

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<sup>5</sup> See my article (in German) <https://jimdo-storage.global.ssl.fastly.net/file/86a3140d-9819-42cc-b53f-edaa0c4d18ec/Gewalt%20Islam.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Otto Bauer, Julius Deutsch, Lenin, Trotzki etc.

<sup>7</sup> Anti-Semitic rituals were practiced even longer, for example, the pilgrimage to the "Anderl von Rinn" in Tyrol, which was only banned by the bishop in 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Nabi Musa 1920

<sup>9</sup> Compare: Sabine Schiffer / Constantin Wagner: Antisemitismus und Islamophobie – ein Vergleich, 2. erweiterte und überarbeitete Neuauflage, Westend Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2021

genuine reckoning with the Holocaust and produce images of "Never Again," not meaning "never again racism" but rather "never again dealing with our own, the only genuinely historical antisemitism, as there is no one left who is affected by it." The fact that they enter into various coalitions, including with ultra-right Israeli parties, is less the fault of these right-wing parties because who would refuse an offer that suits their interests?

This rebranding of the supposedly fundamental "antisemitism of Islam" is done diligently, likely in the expectation that people will eventually come to believe it exists. This goes so far that Muslims are now called upon to rewrite their sources, such as the Quran and other texts, to remove any possible antisemitic interpretation. No one would ever think of rewriting the Bible, and the Good Friday ceremony has already been mentioned. Nevertheless, this has actually managed to frame the frustration and resulting hatred against Israel by Muslims affected by the state's establishment since 1948 as "fundamentally Islamic"<sup>10</sup> and to elegantly bury their own genuinely fundamental antisemitism under the cloak of silence. Various geopolitical interests naturally exploit this rewriting of the origin of antisemitism for their own purposes, as has always been the case with the political offers on our world. It is likely that this rewriting was the last brilliant colonialist act of the "Old Europe," not in the sense of Edward Said's Orientalism, but in the sense of the countries that exported or outsourced their guilty conscience and centuries-old responsibility. The problem is not the idea of a homeland for the Jewish people that corresponds to their ancient spiritual and geographic origin; it is the outsourcing of one's own guilty conscience, responsibility, aggression, and conflict from Europe to those who are actually uninvolved.

While anti-Semitism in Islam, as demonstrated, is not fundamental, the form that has emerged due to the political situation since 1948 must certainly be acknowledged and countered. Not only has the conflict been outsourced from Europe, but the anti-Semitic parameters from Europe are now being adopted and perpetuated on-site by affected Muslims. Simultaneously, the same individuals position themselves as fighters against the so-called "Islamic anti-Semitism." This is another ingenious aspect of the outsourcing process: not only can one continue their own previously directed racism against Jews, but they can also market it as morally correct under the label of "combatting anti-Semitism." As a consequence of colonialism, which affected the entire Islamic world except for Turkey, this political anti-Semitism is spreading among Muslims as a counter-narrative to the former "colonial West." It involves adopting foundational works of secular European anti-Semitism, such as "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," as well as stereotypical European conspiracy theories, naming certain individuals allegedly seeking Jewish world domination. This, in turn, allows Europeans to ignore their own roots in it and shift responsibility onto "the foreigners" while successfully using coded anti-Semitism in combination with Islamophobia to win elections in various countries.

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<sup>10</sup> The Christians among the Palestinians who are also affected by this framing are deliberately not impacted by it.

## **Transgenerational Traumas**

Transgenerational traumas of victims and perpetrators from the time of National Socialism continue to burden European people and are still insufficiently recognized and acknowledged<sup>11</sup>. These traumatic lines that persist across generations, repeatedly leading to actions and injuries in which these traumas unconsciously control people's decision-making, or can lead to both physical and mental illnesses, have the potential to be broken only on a reflective and spiritual level. If this does not happen, these traumas will be passed on to the next generation, who will again be unconsciously controlled by them or suffer from them until someone brings them to consciousness and breaks the cycle. These transgenerational traumas have been naturally present among many Jews as collective traumas for centuries, as seen in the historical developments over the centuries. They have now also been transferred to the Palestinians as a "colonialist inheritance" from Europe. Reflection, both on one's own person, their history, and their own viewpoints, is essential. Otherwise, these traumas will continue to work in every generation that inherits them. Ultimately, among all these interconnecting parameters, the possibility of peace and breaking the cycle of violence lies in the spiritual aspects of religions. As an example, on a very basic spiritual level, both the Quran and the Talmud explicitly state that killing an innocent person is as if one has killed all of humanity. Both self-proclaimed "freedom fighters" who associate Islam with their cause and the Israeli army and state, which define themselves as fundamentally Jewish, must measure their actions against this religious claim.

## **Tasks for Muslims**

It is, therefore, more than necessary for Muslims not to fall into the trap of anti-Semitism as presented here but to become aware of the clear guidelines of their own religion and to consider them without distortion caused by the Middle East conflict. The era of political dominance of the Ottoman Empire is over, and with it, the status of Jews who were anchored there. However, the underlying idea from which this status emerged, rooted in Islam, must be brought back to Muslims' awareness. The Middle East conflict has proven to be unsolvable by politics, consistently failing and resulting in suffering and death for many affected individuals. A solution can only be found through a spiritual approach, as mentioned above, focusing on harmonious coexistence rather than the political dominance of a single-religion state, whether this or that denomination, based on the expulsion of the other population. For this to happen, both parties involved must emancipate themselves from the European outsourcing of responsibility and do their homework. This is also a challenge for the Jewish side, and it may involve questioning and changing certain parameters and aspects of their own self-conception, especially political groups. The Muslims' primary task is, in any case, to make the status of Jews from an Islamic perspective consciously aware and then act on an equal footing in a contemporary democratic manner.

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<sup>11</sup> About transgenerational traumas see: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11620-021-00619->

## **My Connection to All of This**

I learned about Islam through a very trustworthy spiritual tradition that has repeatedly faced political persecution and has learned to convey the essentials without being politically influenced. As an Austrian Muslim with a family history directly connected to the National Socialism on the side of supporters, extending to perpetrators, I belong to a small minority among Muslims worldwide that has a direct personal and, therefore, emotional relationship both with the Islamic Ummah and the actions of my ancestors' generation. This particular sensitivity and expertise stem from my own history, which demands an open analysis and the drawing of lessons. However, it also involves Europe's colonial legacy, a responsibility to view things fairly, even though not as personal involvement but as an obligation<sup>12</sup>. My responsibility as a Muslim is to ensure that my faith is truthfully represented and that it receives its full human rights-mandated freedom to develop. This logically results in solidarity with my fellow believers worldwide, as shared by all religions. All this places me at an intersection of responsibilities, and it is from this point that both this reflection and this article have emerged, and from where I am called to engage with these issues and articulate my resulting reflections to contribute to a more differentiated expertise, as the sum of all these perspectives. I am not alone at this complex juncture; I share it with all Muslims of Central European origin.

So, everyone has something to do. Above all, Europe needs to confront its past and assume its responsibility, ceasing to outsource the self-generated, centuries-old anti-Semitic dynamics but humbly acknowledging them as part of its own culture, shaping its cultural heritage, and ending the traumatic transmission.

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<sup>12</sup> Consider the internationally acclaimed book "The Ratline" by Philippe Sands, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2020, which tells the family history of my wife Friderica Magdalena Wächter-Stanfel, who is even more deeply affected by these issues and their impact on the family