Islamophobia and Antisemitism are Different in Their Potential for Globalization

Torkel Brekke
Oslo Metropolitan University and Centre for Research on Extremism (C-REX), University of Oslo

Abstract: A widespread assumption in research on prejudice and hate crime is that Islamophobia and antisemitism are analogous phenomena: both travel easily across national and cultural boundaries and adapt to new contexts. This article argues that this assumption is incorrect. Islamophobia works well in very different cultural contexts and shows highly diverse localized expressions. Antisemitism is linked to Christian theology even when expressed in Muslim societies and is not global to nearly the same extent as Islamophobia. The key question is this: how can we understand the cultural conditions for the globalization of antisemitism and Islamophobia? To answer this the article looks briefly at Islamophobia and antisemitism in Chinese and Hindu civilizations and then moves on to introduce the theory of cultural models. Islamophobia is a family of more or less similar cultural models belonging to a range of different cultures across time and space. This is the general answer to the question of why Islamophobia is an intensely globalizing prejudice. Islamophobia should be conceptualized as a number of overlapping cultural models found in various societies. Today, local varieties of Islamophobia seem to come into closer contact, to converge and sometimes to exchange elements as a result of intensifying transnational and global communication.

Keywords: Islamophobia, antisemitism, globalization, cultural models, Christian theology, prejudice, India, China

Why is Islamophobia such an intensely globalizing kind of prejudice today while antisemitism is less so?¹ This article is a theoretical and conceptual

¹I am grateful to Brian Klug of Oxford University, Jonathan Fox of Bar Ilan University and David Jacobson of the University of South Florida for reading and commenting on
exploration of the differences between antisemitism and Islamophobia. It starts from the assumption that these differences are crucial to research on religious prejudices and racisms, while the widespread academic and policy approaches that see parallels between the two are unhelpful and misleading.

It should be uncontroversial to state that Islamophobia is global in the sense that anti-Muslim beliefs, tropes, narratives and symbols spread and motivate action in a wide variety of cultural settings, such as the USA and Western Europe (Green 2019; Zempi and Awan 2019), in Eastern Europe (Kalmar 2018), China (Luqiu and Yang 2018), Sri Lanka and Myanmar (Frydenlund 2019), India (Spodek 2010) and Thailand (Jerryson 2011), just to mention a few.

At first glance, the same seems to be the case with antisemitism. There is a large research literature showing how antisemitism exists in many locations and how it spreads like a virus, or rather, how it never disappears but simply goes into a state of latency waiting for the right circumstances to become manifest. In academic literature, one can find hundreds of references to so-called global antisemitism, but one puzzling feature that these references have in common is a lack of attention to the world outside the West and the Middle East. For example, Michel Wieviorka and Philippe Bataille, leading French social scientists and doyens of research on racism and antisemitism, devote a chapter in a 2007 book about hatred against Jews in contemporary France to global antisemitism. Here they claim that antisemitism has always been global. According to Wieviorka and Bataille, in the ancient world, antisemitism was global in the sense that it spread between Egypt, Rome and Greece, while today, the globalization of antisemitism “is organized around perceptions which are focused on a main centre, the Middle East and, more specifically, the Israel-Palestine conflict” (Wieviorka 2007: 76–78). From a different genre is the entry “Global antisemitism” in a recent Handbook on Hate Crime where the global aspect of antisemitism refers to the tendency for antisemitic incidents in countries like the UK and France to follow global events. In other words, incidents are reactions to events in the conflict between Israel and Palestine (Rich 2015: 132–135). A number of books and articles follow the same pattern in that they talk about global antisemitism without ever looking outside the Christian world and the Middle East.

earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to the research group DISCO (Diversity Studies Centre Oslo) at Oslo Metropolitan University where this article was presented and discussed.

This article is part of the research project INTERSECT—Intersecting flows of Islamophobia, which is funded by the Research Council Norway, project code 287230.
A widespread assumption in research literature is that Islamophobia and antisemitism are analogous phenomena: they are virulent systems of prejudice that can travel easily across national and cultural boundaries and be adapted to new cultural contexts. This article’s contention is that this assumption is fundamentally incorrect. Islamophobia works well in highly diverse cultural contexts and can be found in very diverse cultural contexts with localized expression, like the rage against beef-eating in Hindu societies. Antisemitism is not global to nearly the same extent, and certainly not in the same ways. A clear focus on the differences between Islamophobia and antisemitism will help us better understand how and to what extent these issues flow across national and cultural boundaries without losing their key features and harmfulness. The key question for this article is this: *how can we understand the cultural conditions for the globalization of antisemitism and Islamophobia?*

The article proceeds in the following stages. In the first section, it argues that the interpretation of antisemitism and Islamophobia as varieties of racism obscures fundamental differences between them. The second section reminds us that Christian theology is crucial in antisemitism. In the third section, the article argues that antisemitism in the Muslim Middle East is modern and derives from the Christian world. In the fourth section, it proposes that readers re-orient their perspectives on antisemitism and Islamophobia in the sense that they stop taking the Christian perspective for granted and start looking at these phenomena from different vantage points, such as the Chinese or Indian civilizations; in the fifth section, the article introduces the theory of cultural models as a cue to how one can approach the cognitive structures, the belief parts, of antisemitism and Islamophobia. Finally, in the sixth section, the article discusses what this means for the globalizing potential of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

*The Limitations of the Concept of Racism*

Scholarly interest in comparing Islamophobia and antisemitism is growing, both in fields of humanities and social sciences, and although opinions vary regarding the usefulness of such comparisons (Bunzl 2007; Klug 2014), this emerging comparative research literature is becoming more visible than literature dedicated to just one of the two phenomena (Tal and Gordon 2018). The interest in comparison seems in large part to be an effect of rising anti-Muslim sentiment in the West. This has led to endeavors seeking to harness lessons from the past by comparing contemporary Islamophobia to antisemitism in European history. In other words, a common motivation behind comparison is often to try to show the *dangers* of Islamophobia by holding it up against
the terrible mirror of antisemitism. However, this strategy seems futile for pragmatic reasons as it tends to end in politically charged quarrels about the uniqueness of antisemitism and the purported misuse of both concepts. This article argues that comparing Islamophobia and antisemitism is in fact valuable but for entirely different reasons.

Antisemitism and Islamophobia are complex phenomena with both racial and religious connotations at their core. These facets have been variously emphasized in different historical contexts with “scientific” racism often dominating the discourse at least after the mid-nineteenth century. While a number of earlier works, particularly within the humanities, including theology, did explore the multifaceted roles of religion in antisemitism, the latest trend in scholarship has been to explore the ways in which Jewish and Muslim identities have been racialized in Western contexts so that antisemitism and Islamophobia can both be seen as special instances of racism. From the perspective of racialization, antisemitism and Islamophobia clearly have a number of striking similarities, and racializing perspectives have illuminated some of the general and universal characteristics of the processes by which majority populations construe outgroups as different, dangerous and inferior. However, if racialization is the main, or only, focus, there is a risk of losing sight of the fundamental differences between antisemitism and Islamophobia.

On the most general level, social identity theory is a common point of departure in the comparative literature on Islamophobia and antisemitism. Central to this approach is how the construction of collective identity almost inevitably leads to the categorization of people into “us” and “them,” and how the “other” ultimately becomes an imaginative figure. Some comparative studies investigate these historical processes of “othering” within national contexts, i.e., in the Netherlands (Vellenga 2018), Britain (Linehan 2012), Italy (Padovan and Alietti 2012), Norway (Døving 2010), and France (Silverstein 2008) and on a civilizational level (Bunzl 2007). Within this literature, Islamophobia and antisemitism are increasingly identified as forms of racism. For Schiffer and Wagner (2011), it is precisely because antisemitic discourse “is the example par excellence of how an apparently coherent racist system can arise over centuries” that it makes sense to compare antisemitism to Islamophobia, which is understood as racism in its new guise, i.e., cultural racism. This is echoed by Zia-Ebrahimi (2018), who highlights the similarities in mechanisms of racialization in antisemitic and Islamophobic conspiracy theories, a process he calls “conspirational racialization.” A similar argument is made by Marko Hoare who claims that, in the Balkans, both antisemitism and Islamophobia went through a process where religious prejudice gradually evolved into ethnic or racial prejudice (Renton and Gidley 2017).
In 2013, the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies* published a special issue with the title *Racialization and Religion: Race, culture and difference in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia* (Vol. 36, issue 3). The issue was edited by Nasar Meer and included eight articles about various aspects of antisemitism and Islamophobia. The main focus of the special issue was, in the words of the editor, to locate the contemporary study of antisemitism and Islamophobia “squarely within the fields of race and racism” (Meer 2013: 386). The authors’ focus was on processes of racialization and the ways in which Jews and Muslims were marginalized and persecuted as racial minorities rather than as religious groups. The authors did discuss the religious status of Jews and Muslims but chiefly to the extent that religion constituted observable characteristics signaling difference between majority and minority groups so that alien religious practices, combined with other characteristics, could be operationalized in processes of racialization. This is symptomatic for the treatment of the religious facets of antisemitism and Islamophobia by most recent scholarship in the social sciences: studies tend to see religion as important to the extent that it signals difference. The problem with this is that much recent scholarship tends to lose sight of the theological role that religion plays in prejudice. This focus on racialization blurs important differences between Islamophobia and antisemitism and this needs to be corrected by a greater focus on religion as theology and particularly religion as eschatology, that is, to concerns with what happens after death, with the destiny of the soul and the world, and with the meaning and end of history.

**Christian Theology and Antisemitism**

The eschatological components of antisemitism are well known, but a brief discussion will still be useful here to keep a focus on the differences between antisemitism and Islamophobia. Beginning as early as the third century, the Catholic Church taught that the destiny of Jews was to suffer retribution from God for rejecting Christ. The Jews would have to continue in this role until the end of history when they would finally repent, turn to Christ and become Christians. What is more, the very suffering of Jews was taken as a proof that this eschatological understanding of history was correct. As a natural extension of this understanding of theology and divine history, the Church would make every effort to make sure that the Jews would continue to suffer and thus serve as proof that history was moving in the direction intended by God. This official Catholic understanding of history did not change until the radical transformations in doctrines and policies brought by the Second Vatican Council held from 1962–1965 (Connelly 2012).
This eschatological understanding of the historical role of Jews is the religious essence of antisemitism throughout European history. The same eschatological understanding of Jews has shaped antisemitism through the twentieth century and up to the current time. Surely, the Catholic Church has made an attempt to distance itself from modern forms of antisemitism, including the Nazi Holocaust, by claiming that the nineteenth century saw a new kind of hatred arising from nationalism. However, the spirit of the Inquisition continued in the Church and in Christian societies across Europe, not least in Germany, where the Church helped to justify the Nazi Holocaust (Fischer 1998; Kertzer 2001; Michael 2006). The “new” form of Nazi antisemitism was couched in pseudo-scientific language and practice, but the same eschatological understanding of the position of Jews in history continued to form the essence of the cultural system that is antisemitism. The apocalyptic and occult understanding of the role of Jews in history and society was fundamental to Hitler and his followers (see for instance Dawidowicz [1977: 3–47]).

In other words, although several variations of modern antisemitism have left Catholic theology and eschatology behind, they have kept a secularized version of the very same eschatology, which holds that Jews have a very special role to play in the world and that they represent a very particular cosmic evil in the great theatre of history. Antisemitism at its core sees the Jew as a cosmic or transcendent force, and a problem to be solved, irrespective of the theological or scientific language used to define this “Jewish problem.” From this perspective, antisemitism is at bottom a thoroughly Christian phenomenon. On this point, there is a fundamental difference between antisemitism and Islamophobia, which goes unnoticed by research that foregrounds similarities and analogies between the two.

To sum up, this article has stressed religion as eschatology to remind us of the fact that antisemitism in the Christian imaginary has always given a cosmic and theological role to Jews because they are an intimate part of the foundational narrative of Christianity. Christianity was born as a negation of Judaism. As early as the High Middle Ages, Jews were depicted as evil in European theology and folklore. Antisemitism is a Christian phenomenon that hardly travels outside the Christian cultural sphere, while Islamophobia is a phenomenon that transcends cultural and national boundaries and is easily transposed from one cultural context to the next. However, this begs the question of why some of the most virulent forms of antisemitism are seen today in the Muslim Middle East as well as among certain sections of the Muslim populations living in Europe.
**Muslims and “Islamic” Antisemitism**

This article does not intend to draw a complete map of the manifestations of antisemitism and Islamophobia; that would be a demanding task indeed. The point of departure in this article is instead the observation that Islamophobia and antisemitism are fundamentally different phenomena in their potential for globalization and in their actual global reach. The section above argued that antisemitism is a Christian phenomenon bound up with Christian eschatology. At the same time, however, scholars are often presented with data that seems to show how antisemitism today is most prevalent in the Muslim world and among Muslims in the West. Does this mean that antisemitism has somehow been decoupled from its Christian origins?

Commenting on the new antisemitism in Muslim majority societies, Bernard Lewis wrote that the important feature of antisemitism is “the accusation against Jews of cosmic evil,” and that antisemitism is first and foremost a peculiarly Christian prejudice (Lewis 2005). It makes no difference that Jews were often treated badly in antiquity: this was not antisemitism in any meaningful sense of the word. The Romans expressed prejudice against several groups and there was nothing very special about their attitudes to Jews. According to Lewis, antisemitism did not exist in the Islamic world until it was brought there by cultural exchange in the modern period. A similar point is made by a recent empirical study by Jonathan Fox and Lev Topor where the authors use unique global data to explain why people discriminate against Jews (Fox and Topor: in press). They stress that simply observing that Jews are discriminated against in a given society is not a proof of antisemitism because such discrimination might simply be one case of discrimination against many minorities in the society in question.

The status of Jews in Muslim lands through history is a politicized and controversial subject. Some historians emphasize the protection enjoyed by Jews as dhimmi people while others foreground intolerance and persecution. Using current knowledge, it is safe to assume that no educated historian of Islam would claim that Jews had a special status as evil or alien in an eschatological sense in Muslim states. Jews may have been treated with brutality or generosity by Muslim rulers, but that would have been the case for other minorities too, and Jews were never seen to hold a special place in Islamic theology: they were just one of several non-Muslim peoples under Islamic rule. Therefore, in the words of Michael Kiefer, modern antisemitism in the Islamic world should be thought of as Islamized antisemitism (i.e., imported from the Christian world and adapted to a new context) rather than genuinely Muslim or Islamist antisemitism (Kiefer 2006). David Cook has made a similar point.
In classical Islamic apocalyptic literature Jews are not important, but the few references to Jews in this literature is now being read in the context of modern Islamic antisemitic and anti-Israel literature, which is deeply influenced by Christian apocalypticism as well as by the political crises in the Arab world after 1948 (Cook 2012: 370–372). From the perspective of these scholars of political Islam, antisemitism was imported into the Muslim Middle East in distinct phases throughout modern times, the most important of which was the period after the establishment of the state of Israel and the conflict between Arabs and Israel. This was the first time when references to Muslim-Jewish conflicts in the Quran were read by Arab intellectuals in light of European, including Nazi, propaganda to confer a special evil status of cosmic proportions to the Jews (Kiefer 2006: 293ff.). In other words, it is not unreasonable to claim that present day antisemitism among Muslims, particularly Arabs, is a consequence of close contacts between Christian Europe and the Islamic Middle East.

The status and roles of Jews in society and history have been defined through Christian eyes and the modern academic study of antisemitism has been carried out from a Christian point of view. The academic study of Islamophobia is much more recent and more limited in its volume (Hafez 2016; Tal and Gordon 2018). Although the academic field of Islamophobia is riddled with its own political and cultural biases, it is very different from the academic study of antisemitism not least because the scholars who have taken an interest in Islamophobia include people trained in the study of non-Christian societies. For instance, given the prevalence of Islamophobia in modern India, it is unsurprising that a number of Indian social scientists have engaged with the subject of anti-Muslim prejudice and violence. Because of these biases something valuable can be gained from leaving the Christian, or Western, perspective for a moment and looking at the concepts of antisemitism and Islamophobia from new vantage points. In order to reorient the current understanding of antisemitism and Islamophobia, this article proposes looking at the position of Jews in two very different, non-Christian civilizations: China and India.

**Reorienting Antisemitism and Islamophobia**

This section moves from the Western-centric focus that often dominates the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia to a birds-eye view of the global history of these two varieties of prejudice and hate. The article now takes a somewhat impressionistic tour of two great civilizations, India and China, to
see what they can teach us about antisemitism and Islamophobia as global phenomena.

Nathan Katz has made a comparative study of religious acculturation processes in the Jewish communities in the city of Cochin in South India and the city of Kaifeng in the Henan province of China. Both Jewish communities claim to have arrived during the first century CE. The Cochin and Kaifeng environments were extremely different, but in both places, all records show that the Jews were treated well and that their synagogues benefitted from gifts and support both by the authorities and by rich private donors through every century. Comparing the role and place of Jews in Hindu and Chinese society, Katz writes, “in both Confucian and Hindu culture, Jews were welcome guests who practiced their religion in freedom” (Katz and Goldberg 1993: 122). In these two very different cultural environments, small Jewish communities developed completely different strategies for acculturating to the larger society. In Kaifeng, the Jews demonstrated that they were part of Chinese establishment by engaging in the required ancestor worship, while in Cochin, the Jews became a caste by observing ritual purity rules and by performing public Judaism in ways that accommodated Hindu royal rituals and symbols (Katz and Goldberg 1993).

There was never any trace of antisemitism in China and Jews always remained insignificant to society at large and to the authorities. They adjusted to the hegemonic Chinese culture, developed a sectarian identity alongside other communities and were thus able to integrate successfully without losing their Jewish identity (Eber 1999). In 1605, the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci reported that he had encountered a small group of Jews in China, which caused a stir in Europe because in Christian circles, the discovery of “lost tribes” would have deep theological significance (Pollak 1999). The Christian European fascination with “lost” Jews of the Orient continued into the supposedly secular, scientific and globalized era of the late nineteenth century, which can be seen in the work of James Finn, a devout Anglican missionary and British Consul to Jerusalem from 1846 to 1863. In 1849, Finn sent a letter to the Jews of China which was received by the tiny Jewish community in Kaifeng. A reply was sent back in 1850, although this letter was not received by Finn until 1870. The letter states that the Jewish religion is all but forgotten in China, but this was a result of assimilation to the extent of absorption into the majority culture and there is no hint of oppression by the state or by the Chinese majority (Finn 1872: 8).

Muslims, on the other hand, have often been perceived with fear and suspicion whether they belonged to the Chinese-speaking Hui people of China proper or to the Turkic-speaking Uyghurs or Kazakhs of the Xinjiang
borderlands in Central Asia. The negative cultural stereotypes were due to a number of factors. Under the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), Muslims constituted a class of officials, academics and tax-collectors who monopolized positions of power and wealth to the frustration of local Han Chinese. When power returned to the Han Chinese during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Muslims lost the privileges that the Mongols had bestowed on them and experienced increasing discrimination. Under the Manchu Qing empire (1644–1911), a number of large rebellions by Muslim warlords threatened the power of the Qing emperor. The rebellions often started in intra-Muslim rivalry between different Sufi brotherhoods and were rarely attempts to topple the Qing state, but they were suppressed with harsh measures that often entailed the slaughter of innocent Muslims by the thousands; this in turn caused new uprisings (Lipman 1997: 103–104). In Yunnan, the multi-ethnic southern borderlands of Qing China, there was a recurring pattern of massacres and pogroms perpetrated by Han Chinese militias and gangs against the local sinicized Hui Muslims through the nineteenth century. This all resulted in the famous Panthay rebellion of 1857 and the establishment of a short-lived sultanate in defense against anti-Muslim violence (Atwill 2005). Although in theory, Chinese policy would treat all ethnic and religious groups in the same way that they would treat members of the majority Han people, in actual fact, local law enforcement was often colored by Han culture, which was, according to Jonathan N. Lipman, “actively and vociferously anti-Muslim” to a degree where Muslims were portrayed in Chinese folk culture as murderous bogeymen used by mothers to threaten children stay quiet and go to sleep in the evening (Lipman 1988: 77). This widespread Han Chinese perception of Muslims as dangerous troublemakers has, if anything, been reinforced by the integration of Xinjiang and its Turkic Muslims into modern China.

Like China, India has no history of antisemitism, at least not before the Portuguese arrival in the early 1500s and their establishment of an inquisition similar to the Catholic inquisition in Europe. In fact, the background for establishing an inquisition in the Portuguese colony of Goa in 1560 was the suspicion that some of the Hindu converts who had emigrated there from Europe had not left all traces of Judaism behind. Although the Portuguese inquisitors in India sometimes did persecute individuals from other communities, persons suspected of practicing Judaism were hunted down with zeal, not only in Goa itself but also in the older Jewish community of Cochin. Jews were burnt at the stake for their religious “crimes”; if they repented and converted to Catholicism, they might hope at least to be strangled to death before they were devoured by flames (Priolkar 1998).
Thus, the Goa inquisition introduced Catholic antisemitism to India. However, in order for the Catholic image of the cosmically evil Jew to make sense to local Hindus or Muslims in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Goa and Cochin, it would need to be integrated into local languages and cultures in the same way that other notions of Catholic theology were translated, notions such as a transcendent God, the virgin birth, the nature of Christ as God’s son, the idea of the Trinity, the nature of the soul, the destiny of mankind and so on. However, historical research into the translation of such theological concepts has shown that it is extremely difficult to make even basic theological ideas intelligible in a different culture, which is one of the reasons why Christian missionary activity in Asia was often a failure (Brekke 2006). It is reasonable to state, then, that antisemitism could not make sense in India because it was, and still is, a set of ideas closely linked to a number of other theological ideas that are incomprehensible to somebody with a typical Hindu worldview. Antisemitism brought persecution and death in the Christian enclave of Goa, but if a person were to travel from the Konkan coast into the Indian subcontinent, say in the year 1650 or 1700, the idea of the evil Jew would have been unintelligible to everyone from the lowly Hindu farmer to the Muslim ruler at the Mughal court.

The case of Islam and Muslims in India is very different from that of Judaism and Jews because Islam has been a major element of Indian society and culture for at least a millennium and for much of history India has been ruled by Muslim rulers and dynasties. There is a vast scholarly literature about the contribution of Islam to India and about varieties of Muslim-Hindu interactions in different periods. A thorough review would be impossible here, but a good place to start is the books and articles by Richard M. Eaton, not least the recent India in the Persianate Age, 1000–1765 (Eaton 2019). It is important to note that concepts like Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism have been unstable, irrelevant or simply unknown to many, perhaps to most, people in premodern India and religious identities have generally not been as exclusionary as they have become in recent times. However, there can be no doubt that in some parts of India in some historical periods there has been a clear divide between a Muslim ruling elite and a Hindu peasantry. Without transposing modern ideas of rigid religious identities onto the past it is reasonable to say that Hindus of India—as well as Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists—have formed ideas about Islam as a powerful political and cultural force over centuries. Moreover, ideas about Islam as an essentially alien political force made sense to many Hindus when modern Indian Islamophobia was developed in the early twentieth century by ideologues like V. D. Savarkar (1883–1966), K. B. Hedgewar (1889–1940) and M. S. Golwalkar (1906–1973). The encounter with the West
through colonization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries generated powerful religious and social reform movements that would fundamentally alter the perceptions that most Indians have about both their own religious identities and the identities of the religious other (Jones 1989; Brekke 1999). This transformation in religious, social and political worldviews became a precondition for the development of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism, from the early twentieth century. Islamophobia is a core element in this ideology and this is evident when we consider how the Hindu nationalist political party called BJP governs contemporary India according to majoritarian and chauvinist principles at the expense of minority rights and welfare.

To wrap up, this section of the article is about the global presence of cultural models about Muslims and the global absence of cultural models about Jews. Using Han China and Hindu India as a vantage point, it is reasonable to say that in societies where non-Muslims are in the majority, beliefs and attitudes have emerged during the past centuries concerning the nature of Islam and Muslims that have taken deep roots both among common people, elites and in government policies. China and India here serve as examples of something general and there is any number of other possible examples of cultures that could have been studied to find similar patterns. In short, a number of cultures have similar beliefs and attitudes about Islam and Muslims and perhaps the most basic reason for this fact is that Islam and Muslims’ identity are global such that they constitute a “special world system,” in the words of John O. Voll. Islam is a system of cosmopolitan links, of transnational Sufi brotherhoods, of universalizing political, social and religious ideals and symbols and practices (Voll 1994). Jews and Judaism, on the other hand, have made very little impact on non-Christian cultures and have certainly never come across as a political threat or a cultural competitor.

Antisemitism and Islamophobia as Cultural Models

Let us now turn to the cognitive dimensions of antisemitism and Islamophobia. Brian Klug has rightly argued that a good definition of antisemitism must start not with a focus on hostile feelings, but with the cognitive content of the antisemite. Antisemitism is best defined, Klug insists, by an answer to the question, “[w]hat is a Jew?” (Klug 2013: 6). In order to meaningfully research antisemitism and Islamophobia, one should look for the cultural schemas that underpin and support feelings. In order to more systematically analyze the nature of the beliefs underlying Islamophobia and antisemitism, a theory that takes the cognitive contents of culture seriously is needed. Let us consider the theory of cultural models. This theory has been developed by
cognitive anthropologists concerned with finding the right methodological tools to reveal beliefs that underpin human action (D’Andrade and Strauss 1992; Strauss and Quinn 1998). Cultural models is a concept that is often interchangeable with cultural schemas in cognitive anthropology. Cultural models, or schemas, consist of beliefs that form people’s understanding of the world. Schemas are mental frameworks that bundle knowledge together in an organized way for the individual and cultural schemas are those schemas that are shared by a group of people large and cohesive enough that it is considered a culture. In this view, a piece of knowledge can in theory be stated as a sentence, or a set of sentences, that the brain stores in whatever language is used by the relevant community (Strauss and Quinn 1998: 51). The size of cultures that share schemas can vary. For example, there may be talk about a culture within a profession, say, medical doctors, or about the large national culture of a whole country.

Cultural models reside in the brains of individuals, but they are, by definition, widely shared by members of a culture. The schemas are often unconscious and unavailable to the cultural insider because they are taken for granted. Thus, any research effort to reveal or reconstruct cultural models needs to approach them obliquely, or indirectly, through careful analysis of ethnographic, sociological or historical data. This means that empirical research aiming to uncover cultural models about Jews and Muslims in a particular place and time would need to specify the kind of data from which one could plausibly collect evidence about particular beliefs concerning the religious groups in question. Cultural models have properties that are important to the understanding of the differential globalization of antisemitism and Islamophobia and a couple of the most essential of these properties will be briefly addressed.

Firstly, cultural models have durability because they exist both in individual minds and in publicly available expressions, like in books and art. Old cultural models can be revived and regenerated after periods of dormancy because they are stored outside of minds and can be retrieved. Culture is reproduced and transmitted to new generations intentionally and unintentionally. In addition to unintentionally recreating the world they know by the schemas they enact, people also act intentionally to pass on practices and beliefs that they value to ensure that their own enduring schemas will become the schemas of the next generation of individuals (Strauss and Quinn 1998: 113). Cultural schemas are also durable in an individual’s mind because the neural networks that are generated when children learn things are hard to change. One of the functions that cultural schemas have is to make life simpler for individuals because the understandings are easily activated and fill in missing information.
in the environment. This self-reinforcing property of cultural schemas makes them durable in the individual and, in the words of Strauss and Quinn, “[t]his tendency of schemas to fill in for us can block disconfirming evidence” (Strauss and Quinn 1998: 91). Emotions like fear, anger and disgust further reinforce schemas and this helps explain why schemas learned in infancy are so durable (1998: 93). Strauss and Quinn show how stereotypes, which they see as a type of schema, have a tendency to reinforce themselves and Strauss and Quinn use racism against blacks in America as an example of “ways in which schemas can be self-reinforcing” (1998: 92).

Secondly, in Strauss and Quinn's analysis, cultural schemas have motivational force for an individual. Schemas do not consist solely of ideas and concepts but also of feelings that create and organize motivation. When parents or others teach children new things, they often emphasize the emotional and motivational aspects of learning and from the point of view of socialization, this motivational aspect is essential to culture. Motivational force is created by the individual repeating actions and experiences so that the pattern comes to appear as the only natural way to think and behave. However, motivation is also strongly embedded in cultural schemas through a number of rewards and punishments that the individual receives, from the straightforward smile or slap that the child may experience to the positive social evaluations that adults receive when they behave in ways that correspond to the cultural schemas shared within the group, or with society.

To wrap up this section, it is suggested that Islamophobia and antisemitism are cultural models. Such models are durable, they have a tendency to survive through time and they are hard to change in the individual. They also have motivational force as they are learned and organized with emotions in the body. To keep the focus on the cognitive contents, the cultural model of antisemitism consists of beliefs about Jews as a transcendent evil and an other-worldly threat to society, to the cosmos and to God's plan for humanity. This cultural model of antisemitism has great fit in a Christian context because it is enmeshed with several other Christian theological ideas and this is why it is important to take the religious aspects of antisemitism into account. However, antisemitism has no appeal—in fact, it makes no sense—in two major Asian cultures because it is a bad fit with the other cognitive models of these cultures. On the other hand, the cultural model of Islamophobia is about an immanent, this-worldly, threat against social and political order and it fits well with both Hindu Indian and Han Chinese culture, and with many other cultures across the world.
The Cultural Conditions for Prejudice

Based on the global presence of cultural schemas pertaining to Jews and Muslims, Islamophobia is more contagious globally than antisemitism. This means that Islamophobias should be talked about more in the plural but antisemitism should continue to be spoken about in the singular. Many cultures across the globe: Christian, Chinese, Hindu, Buddhist and others, have long-standing cultural schemas pertaining to Islam and Muslims and although these cultural schemas are not identical, they do constitute what can be thought of as a global cultural infrastructure for different varieties of Islamophobia.

With the theory of cultural models as vantage point, Islamophobia should be understood as a family of more or less similar cultural models belonging to a range of different cultures across time and space. This is the general answer to the question of why Islamophobia is an intensely globalizing prejudice while antisemitism is not. Islamophobia is not one thing. It is a number of relatively similar cultural models found in various societies. Today, the cultural models that can be labeled as Islamophobias seem to come into close contact, to converge and sometimes to exchange elements as a result of intensifying transnational and global communication.

The point is that in today’s world, this global infrastructure constituted by cultural schemas about Muslims facilitates the rapid spread of Islamophobic tropes, narratives, conspiracy theories and symbols between societies and actors that belong to very different cultures. This is because the infrastructure provided by the cultural schemas makes narratives about Muslims readily understandable in many places at the same time. This ensures that a message about a Muslim conspiracy to take over Europe can travel between, say, Sweden, Israel, India, Sri Lanka and China and still make sense. It seems that the coupling of global technological infrastructure to the global cognitive infrastructure provided by cultural schemas about Muslims in a variety of societies across the world is creating perfect conditions for Islamophobia in the present. When one observes, for instance, that Islamophobic tropes flow seamlessly between some sections of the Hindu diaspora in the UK or the USA and white far-right groups in those countries, it tells us something about the enabling technological infrastructure, but also about the cultural infrastructure that makes the tropes intelligible to members of very different cultures (Leidig 2018).

In contrast, antisemitism is a phenomenon that is global only to the extent that Christianity is global because the cultural model of the Jew, which underpins antisemitism, is thoroughly embedded in Christian theology. Antisemitism has been a permanent feature of Christian societies and it has to
some degree defined what it means to be Christian through making a radical distinction, historically, morally and socially, between Christians and Jews. The corollary is that for antisemitism to be transposed to a new culture, that new host culture first has to adopt cultural schemas about the eschatological role of Jews. However, cultural schemas about the special nature of Jews are intimately linked to cultural schemas about the nature of God, of Jesus Christ, of the destiny of mankind and the direction of history etc., which means they make no sense outside their Christian context. One might object that Christianity is a global religion that can be found on all continents, but this simply means that the study of antisemitism in Africa or Asia will be the study of local Christianity and its uses of cultural schemas pertaining to Jews.

It is clear, then, that the argument being made here is about globalization and the local adaptations of global tropes, including what can be called “glocalization” following the work of Roland Robertson, a pioneer in the sociological investigation of globalization, culture and identity (Robertson 1994 and 1995). There is a fundamental difference between Islamophobia and antisemitism in their relative capacity for being globalized and there are specific reasons for this difference that have to do with the cultural schemas underpinning Islamophobia and antisemitism in their respective local manifestations. These cultural schemas can be understood as the cultural conditions for the globalization of Islamophobia and antisemitism.

Summary

This article has pointed out that the present research focus on antisemitism and Islamophobia as varieties of racism obscures fundamental differences between the two phenomena; suggested an emphasis on the Christian theological core of antisemitism; suggested a reorientation of research perspectives on antisemitism and Islamophobia in the sense that the Christian perspective is no longer taken for granted and these phenomena are viewed from different vantage points; used China and India as examples of such alternative vantage points in a more global research agenda about antisemitism and Islamophobia; and, finally, suggested that the theory of cultural models is taken as a cue to how one can approach the cognitive structures of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

What is the use of this? The focus on cultural models could help us understand why Islamophobia or antisemitism does or does not work in specific contexts. For example, it could illuminate why antisemitism did not work in Japan before and during the second world war. The alliance between German and Japanese fascists would seem like perfect conditions for antisemitism to take roots in East Asia. In the 1920s and 1930s persecution sent large numbers
of Jews fleeing from many parts of Europe and Jews found that most foreign countries refused them entry. Japanese-occupied Shanghai was in this period the only port in the world where no questions were asked of Jews who came as refugees. Thousands of Jews arrived in the city from Germany, Poland, The Baltic states, Russia and other countries and many of them were highly educated and well connected to Jews in other parts of the world. This resulted in the setting up of several Zionist organizations among the Jews in Shanghai from 1929 and these were connected to the global Zionist cause and often received backing and support from local authorities (Naoki 1999; Guang 1999). Japanese culture did not have the cultural models of Jews as evil and dangerous and the antisemitism of the Nazis simply could not make sense to them (Kranzler 1976).

More importantly, the exposition of the differences between antisemitism and Islamophobia helps to better frame questions that are basic to research about these patterns of prejudice today. Why is Islamophobia today such an intensely globalized kind of prejudice while antisemitism is less so? What is the globalizing potential of antisemitism and Islamophobia? This article has been theoretical and conceptual, not empirical. Future research efforts on antisemitism and Islamophobia need to operationalize the questions posed here by careful local, ethnographic or historical research that seeks to reveal and reconstruct the cultural models that actually work as the globalizing infrastructure for the spread of antisemitism and Islamophobia today. In particular, scholars need to investigate empirically how various local expressions of Islamophobia underpin and facilitate transnational and global flows of Islamophobia and how these global and transnational flows, in turn, justify and bolster local expressions of prejudice and hate.

References


Finn, James. 1872. *The Orphan Colony of Jews in China. Containing a letter received from themselves, with the latest information concerning them*. Franklin Classics.


Islamophobia and Antisemitism are Different in Their Potential for Globalization


Islamophobia and Antisemitism are Different in Their Potential for Globalization


