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Yolande Jansen & Nasar Meer

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Genealogies of ‘Jews’ and ‘Muslims’: social imaginaries in the race–religion nexus

YOLANDE JANSEN AND NASAR MEER

In 1942, the French-Jewish philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch wrote:

Among all the fascist impostures, anti-Semitism is not the one that reaches the greatest number of victims, but it is the most monstrous. Perhaps for the first time men are officially tracked down *not for what they do, but for what they are*. They expiate their ‘being’ and not their ‘having’: not acts, a political opinion or a profession of faith like the Cathars, the Freemasons, or the Nihilists, but the fate of birth.¹

For Jankélévitch, antisemitism confirmed a conceptual configuration that had been developing over the course of several centuries, where ‘race’, ‘religion’ and ‘political opinion’ had each achieved their particular and clearly distinguished status. For ‘being’ there was the category of race, while ‘having’ concerned acts, religious belief and political opinion. Persecution because of one’s being was what in his view illustrated the novelty and specificity of antisemitism as racism. The characterization is an illustration of an early European bifurcation between racisms, omitting as it does how chattel slavery had

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1 Vladimir Jankélévitch, ‘Psycho-analyse de l’antisémitisme’, published anonymously in *Le Mensonge raciste*, pamphlet published by the ‘National Movement against Racism (Toulouse 1942), quoted in Pierre-André Taguieff, *The Force of Prejudice: On Racism and Its Doubles*, trans. from the French and ed. by Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press 2001), 25.

2 *Patterns of Prejudice*

literally tracked men and women down ‘not for what they do, but for what they are’. This framing was part of a common tendency of not-relating the race-making of one group to another, and, in particular, betrays a focus on Europe ‘itself’ instead of considering Europe a colonial space intimately connected to its exterior. The underlying conceptual scheme that opposes race and religion, being and having, is still a prominent feature of public controversies concerning Islam, religion and secularism in Euro-Atlantic contexts, often centring on the comparability of antisemitism and Islamophobia. The scheme especially defines a distinction between *critique of religion* (and, therefore, of ‘Islam’), deemed legitimate because it targets opinion, ideology and belief, and *racism*, in which antisemitism is located.² Illustrating this train of thought in an editorial in *Charlie Hebdo*, editor-in-chief Gérard Biard writes, on 1 March 2017, fourteen months after the murder of his colleagues:

Islamophobia has been conceptualised on the basis of a deliberately vicious postulate: critiquing Islam is insulting all Muslims. Antisemitism, by contrast, hits the Jews without distinction, whether they are believers or atheists, stick to religious practices or do not. It has as a target human beings for what they are, not for what they think or believe. Islam is a religious and political doctrine, that even implies a societal project. It is something that one chooses, or that one sees imposed on oneself. Such a thing can be the target of critique, but not of racism. Critique of a doctrine, of its rules, symbols and of those who promote them is perfectly legitimate in a democracy. It is even one of its foundations. So let’s talk about the real problem and ask a real question: those who do not stop talking of Islamophobia, do they desire to finish with democracy?³

In the international scholarly literature, the neat distinction between race, religion and, we would like to add, political opinion, has been increasingly problematized. Scholars of race have been at the forefront of this by insisting that race is about much more than ‘being’, origins, birth and skin colour, and that it

2 Nasar Meer, ‘The politics of voluntary and involuntary identities: are Muslims in Britain an ethnic, racial or religious minority?’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2008, 61–81.

3 Original text: ‘L’islamophobie a été conceptualisée sur la base d’un postulat délibérément vicié: critiquer l’islam c’est insulter tous les musulmans ... L’antisémitisme, lui, frappe les Juifs indifféremment, qu’ils soient croyants ou athées, pratiquants ou non. Il cible des êtres humains pour ce qu’ils sont, en non pour ce qu’ils pensent ou croient. ... L’islam est une doctrine religieuse et politique, qui implique de surcroît un projet de société. C’est quelque chose que l’on choisit ou que l’on se voit imposer. Il ne peut être la cible que de critiques, pas de racisme. La critique d’une doctrine, de ses règles, de ses symboles et de ceux qui les promeuvent est parfaitement légitime en démocratie. Elle en est même l’un des fondements. Alors appelons le problème par son vrai nom et posons une vraie question: ceux qui n’ont que le mot ‘islamophobie’ à la bouche, souhaitent-ils en finir avec la démocratie?’ Gérard Biard, ‘Éditorial’, *Charlie Hebdo*, 1 March 2017, 3.

has routinely been constructed with cultural dimensions playing a role in it.⁴ Moreover, scholars have traced the provenance of the category of 'religion' to the emergence of modern categories of race. In Sebastian de Covarrubias's infamous sixteenth-century dictionary, for example, race was in fact synonymous with the words 'blood' and 'religion'.⁵ Indeed, there is ample evidence that religious culture and physical traits were deemed as co-constitutive of a racial category prior to its articulation in Atlantic slavery and Enlightenment-informed colonial encounters, even prior to the Reconquista. For example, when Islam is first encountered in Europe, 'the Prophet Muhammad (with his Jewish parents and Nestorian/heretical teacher)' is embodied as a dark-skinned, satanic menace.⁶ In addition, while the emergence of the notion of 'blood purity' in fifteenth-century Spain was not specifically related to skin colour, it did come up, as race theories later did, as a means to argue that those Jews who had (forcibly) converted to Christianity still remained Other or at least 'Otherable' after they had been turned into *conversos*, 'new Christians'.⁷ In the Americas, meanwhile, the idea of race was fundamental in early modern Protestant justifications of why Blacks were to remain slaves after their conversion to Christianity, as has recently been traced in detail in Katherine Gerbner's account of Protestantism and slavery.⁸

In Europe, where even critical humanities scholarship has until recently remained inattentive to the legacies of Europe's involvement in Atlantic slavery, the intertwining of race and religion has primarily been traced in relation to the fate of European Jews. The iteration of 'religion', as it had come to mean 'personally adopted belief' in the course of modernity, gained prominence as a social and governmental category especially in the nineteenth

4 See Étienne Balibar, 'Is there a neo-racism?', in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds), *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. of Balibar from the French by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso 2010), 37–67; Alana Lentin, 'Europe and the silence about race', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2007, 487–503; and Nasar Meer, 'Racialization and religion: race, culture and difference in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, 385–98 (388).

5 Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2000), 29; Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press 2014).

6 Nabil Matar, 'Britons and Muslims in the early modern period: from prejudice to a (theory of) toleration', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 43, no. 3/4, 2009, 213–31 (217).

7 Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos: Split Identity and Emerging Modernity* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2009), 73–7.

8 Katherine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2019). Please note that we do not use 'conversion' as a scholarly term, but as a term that has guided the ways in which European Christianity has understood its relations with peoples and individuals of non-Christian background.

century. This is when ‘Judaism became a religion’, in the words of Leora Batnitzky.⁹ This development went hand in hand with a political discourse requiring the assimilation/secularization of Jews, and an uncoupling of Judaism from culture, law and peoplehood, something coterminous with a reassembled category of race that took part of the elements of collective belonging that mirrored ethno-religious background. We can trace how this process unfolded clearly in the French case, in which Jews, after the French Revolution, were on the one hand enabled to ‘emancipate’ by rendering their Judaism into a personal belief irrelevant to their citizenship, while, on the other hand, were increasingly identified as a collective in terms of their Jewish ‘race’.¹⁰ In her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt offered an early analysis of how this is relevant to the way ‘race’ in Europe came to be forged by religion and secularization, distinguishing Judaism (as a collective tradition) from Jewishness (as a racial category) that followed with the privatization of ‘being Jewish’. Interestingly, in a posthumously published article she wrote in the 1930s, Arendt had already stressed the interaction of the meanings of Judaism in European modernity:

Whether the Jews are a religion or a nation, a people or a race, a state or a tribe, depends on the special opinion non-Jews—in whose midst Jews live—have about themselves, but it certainly has no connection whatever with any germinal knowledge about the Jews. As the people of Europe became nations, the Jews became ‘a nation within the nation’; as the Germans began to see in the state something more than their political representation, that is, as their fundamental ‘essence,’ the Jews became a state within a state. . . . And since the end of the last century, when the Germans transformed themselves at last into Aryans, we have been wandering through world history as Semites. . . .¹¹

In this mode of thought, Judaism, as a concept, as image, as the religion of the Other, is a formative part of how both Christian and secular visions of Europe rely on the racial-religious nexus. It is in this repertoire that we must locate, first, the nineteenth-century ‘Jewish question’ and, second, the very notion of the Semite (as a racial category) in European scholarship.

9 Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2011); Yaacov Yadgar, *Sovereign Jews: Israel, Zionism, and Judaism* (Albany: State University of New York Press 2017).

10 See Yolande Jansen, *Secularism, Assimilation and the Crisis of Multiculturalism: French Modernist Legacies* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2013); and Wendy Brown, ‘Tolerance and/or equality? The “Jewish question” and the “woman question”’, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2004, 1–31.

11 Hannah Arendt, ‘Antisemitism’, in Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron. H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books 2007), 49–121 (68–9).

Both are perhaps illustrated in how a philosopher like Martin Heidegger could be anxious, in the 1930s, about ‘the Judaification of the German intellectual life’.¹² In our present moment, a central part of mainstream public and political discourse is steeped in the fear of an analogous ‘Islamicization’ of Europe,¹³ promoting a ‘Muslim question’ or the Eurabia myth more broadly.¹⁴ As a consequence, there has been a growing interest in studying the intimate genealogies connecting Judaism and Jews and those concerning Muslims and Islam.¹⁵ This strand of scholarship shares something with Edward Said’s sentiment that he had found himself ‘writing the history of a strange secret sharer of western anti-Semitism. That anti-Semitism and, as I have discussed in its Islamic branch, Orientalism resemble each other very closely is a historical, cultural and political truth. . .’.¹⁶ To some extent, Said’s ‘secret sharer’ anticipated the subsequent trajectories of scholarship tracing the historical connections between race and religion, antisemitism and Islamophobia. Less well known than Said, the French historian of philology Maurice Olender traced the emergence of ‘the Semite’ and of ‘the Aryan’ in nineteenth-century humanities. The ‘Semite’ was the figure underlying the concept of ‘antisemitism’ as racism, and the one that, at least

- 12 Martin Heidegger, ‘Brief an Geheimrat Victor Schworer’, quoted in Ulrich Sieg, ‘Die Verjudung des deutschen Geistes’, *Zeit Online*, 22 December 1989, available at www.zeit.de/1989/52/die-verjudung-des-deutschen-geistes/komplettansicht (viewed 5 March 2020). The full text of the passage is: ‘Was ich in meinem Zeugnis nur indirekt andeuten konnte, darf ich hier deutlicher sagen: es geht um nichts Geringeres als um die unaufschiebbare Besinnung darauf, daß wir vor der Wahl stehen, unserem deutschen Geistesleben wieder echte bodenständige Kräfte und Erzieher zuzuführen oder es der wachsenden Verjudung im weiteren u. engeren Sinne endgültig auszuliefern.’ Translations, unless other stated, are by the authors.
- 13 ‘Geert Wilders warnt vor “Islamisierung Europas”’, *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 7 February 2011, available at www.abendblatt.de/politik/ausland/article107950496/Geert-Wilders-warnt-vor-Islamisierung-Europas.html; see also the well-referenced *Wikipedia* entry on ‘Geert Wilders’ at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geert_Wilders (both viewed 5 March 2020). This is a recurring theme in much of the Dutch populist press and also, regrettably, in some scholarly literature concerned with Islam in Europe, closely connected to the populist parties *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) and the *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD): consider, for example, the work of Paul Cliteur and Thierry Baudet. See also Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 2010); and Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury 2018). Anthropologist Sindre Bangstad has extensively traced the rise of this discourse in his *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia* (London: Zed Books 2014).
- 14 Nasar Meer, ‘Misrecognising Muslim consciousness in Europe’, *Ethnicities*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2012, 178–96.
- 15 James Renton (ed.), ‘Islamophobia and surveillance: genealogies of the global order’, special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 41, no. 12, 2018; James Renton and Ben Gidley (eds), *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe: A Shared Story?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017).
- 16 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Pantheon 1978), 27–8.

historically, very evidently brings Jews and Muslims together. Olender discussed how this category gained prominence in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philology, in the work of cosmopolitan humanists with theological backgrounds, such as J. G. Herder in Germany and Ernest Renan in France.¹⁷

Since those early contributions, Gil Anidjar has considered how, in their intertwined histories as *Semites*, Jews and Arabs together formed a couple—one in which, in European discourses, the Jew was the internal enemy and the Arab was the external one—and analysed the political present in relation to this legacy.¹⁸ More recently, James Renton has drawn attention to the long historical roots of this process: ‘From the end of the eighth century, Christian theologians identified both [Islam and Judaism] together as heresies—internal corruptions of religious truth.’¹⁹ There is then an increasingly established

17 Maurice Olender, *Les Langues du paradis: Semites et Aryens, un couple providentiel* (Paris: Gallimard 1989), trans. into English as *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press 2008). See the [Zukunftphilologie](#) Research Program at the Freie Universität Berlin, directed by the Arabic Studies scholar Islam Dayeh, and the journal *Philological Encounters*, especially Maurice Olender, ‘Between sciences of origins and religions of the future: questions of philology’, *Philological Encounters* vol. 2, no. 3/4, 2017, 201–36; and Céline Trautmann-Waller, ‘Semites and Semitism: from philology to the language of myth’, *Philological Encounters*, vol. 2, no. 3/4, 2017, 346–67. See also Céline Trautmann-Waller, ‘Du “caractère des peuples sémitiques” à une “science de la mythologie hébraïque” (Ernest Renan, Heymann Steinthal, Ignác Goldziher)’, *Revue germanique internationale*, no. 7, 2008, 169–84.

18 Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2003). Since then, a lot of work has been concentrated around the figure of the Semite. See, most notably, Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2008); Joseph A. Massad, ‘Forget Semitism!’, in Joseph A. Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2015), 312–41; Gil Z. Hochberg, ‘“Remembering Semitism” or “On the prospect of re-membering the Semites”’, *ReOrient*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2016, 192–223; and Atalia Omer, *Days of Awe: Reimagining Jewishness in Solidarity with Palestinians* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press 2019).

19 James Renton, ‘The figure of the fanatic: a rebel against Christian sovereignty’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 41, no. 12, 2018, 2161–78 (2165). For studies of the continuities (and discontinuities) from early Christianity onwards, see also David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company 2013); and Daniel Boyarin, ‘The Christian invention of Judaism: the Theodosian empire and the rabbinic refusal of religion’, *Representations*, vol. 85, no. 1, 2004, 21–57. And, for a genealogy specifically concentrating on the Middle Ages, see Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018). See also the contribution of Matthea Westerduin in this issue, and Westerduin’s dissertation ‘Remembering Supersessionist Geographies’ (forthcoming July 2020).

scholarly literature on race and religion, Jews and Muslims, antisemitism and Islamophobia and their historical interconnections, as well as their intersections today.²⁰ What we try to do in this issue is to build on these studies by analysing how the past and the present are related in the specific forms of Othering under discussion: that is, by focusing on how the genealogies of the Others of the European 'Christo-secular' imagination are at work today in re-imagining the race-religion nexus. We study the contemporary traces of specific conceptual-imaginary figures of both Judaism and Islam, of Jews and Muslims, of Semites, as the constitutive Others of Christo-secular Europe. Thus, in connection with our reading of the genealogies of these specific conceptual-imaginary figures, we analyse their discursive and political deployment in specific European contexts today.

Thus, each of the articles assembled in this issue traces a specific genealogy of the complicated past of the European imaginaries concerning 'Jews' and 'Muslims', 'Judaism' and 'Islam', and brings it into connection with a contemporary question or issue. In Yvonne Sherwood's terms, we study the period 'ASV' ('After the Satanic Verses', in this issue), and this periodization includes 'after 9/11', after 'Charlie Hebdo' and after the increasing politicization and securitization of religion worldwide. Indeed, a number of imagined figures for racial-religious Othering stand out as specific focal points for the articles in this issue. First, we return to the figure of the 'Semite' in art and literature (Hochberg, Jansen), study the related figure of the 'Arab Jew' in contemporary and nineteenth-century art (Hochberg, Shohat). Second, we connect the present use of the concept of Judaeo-Christianity to its emergence in nineteenth-century theology (Topolski). Third, we study the emergence of the

20 James Pasto, 'Islam's "strange secret sharer": Orientalism, Judaism, and the Jewish question', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1998, 437–74; Matti Bunzl, 'Between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: some thoughts on the new Europe', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2005, 499–508; Nasar Meer and Tehseen Noorani, 'A sociological comparison of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain', *Sociological Review*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2008, 195–219; Ivan Davidson Kalmar, 'Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: the formation of a secret', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2009, 135–43; Susannah Heschel, 'German Jewish scholarship on Islam as a tool for de-Orientalizing Judaism', *New German Critique*, no. 117, 2012, 91–117; Esther Romeyn, 'Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: spectropolitics and immigration', *Theory Culture & Society*, vol. 31, no. 6, 2014, 77–101; Brian Klug, 'The limits of analogy: comparing Islamophobia and antisemitism', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2014, 442–59; Mohse Zuckermann, 'Judensolidarität und Islamophobie in Deutschland: Anmerkungen zu einer ideologischen Verschwisterung. Ein Essay', in Farid Hafez (ed.), *Jahrbuch für Islamophobieforschung* (Vienna: New Academic Press 2012), 11–16 (16); Meer, 'Racialization and religion', 388; Nasar Meer, 'Semantics, scales and solidarities in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, 500–15; Nasar Meer, 'Islamophobia and postcolonialism: continuity, Orientalism and Muslim consciousness', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2014, 500–15; Farid Hafez, 'Comparing anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: the state of the field', *Islamophobia Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2016, 16–34; Renton and Gidley (eds), *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Europe*.

notion of Islam and Judaism as specifically ‘political religions’ in comparison to (Protestant) Christianity in early modernity and connect this to the actuality of that archive in contemporary political theory (Yelle, Blijdenstein). Fourth, we discuss the legacies today of figuring ‘Islam’ as a political religion in theorizing the ‘radicalization’ of Muslims in securitization discourses (De Koning). Fifth, we trace the emergence of the notion of ‘race’ in the Christian context in the Middle Ages, in connection to a critique of the distinction between modernity as ‘secular’ and the Middle Ages as ‘theological’ (Westerduin). Sixth, we study the archive of the intertwined figures of ‘Jews’ and ‘Muslims’ in visual culture, in cartoons in particular, in the nineteenth century, the early twentieth century and in the recent history of *Charlie Hebdo* (Sherwood in *The Freethinker*, and Horsman in *Charlie Hebdo*). And, finally, we point to the ways in which these archival figures play out in the politicization of antisemitism in the European context today (Kalmar, Romeyn).

Each of the imaginary-conceptual figures studied, Muslims, Jews, Semites, Arab Jews and so on, might lead the reader of these essays to turn her attention away from the active, Othering party, which we have called the ‘Christo-secular’ imaginaries that invent their ‘Jews’, ‘Muslims’, ‘Semites’, ‘Arab Jews’ and even their victims of antisemitism or Islamophobia. We actively try to draw attention to the ‘fuller picture’, and make a collective attempt to bring together and deepen lines of research where we can see how, as Yvonne Sherwood formulates this in her contribution, ‘the spectral figures of “the Jew” and “the Muslim” are differently tangential, and are used to divert controversy away from the Christian’ (see also the articles by Hochberg and Shohat). We, as editors of this special issue, would like to add to the Christian in Sherwood’s formulation the secular that has developed from the Christian and is intimately related to it. Thus the reader will notice how each of us draws attention to the ways in which the conceptual-imaginary figures under study have been constructed in the course of European history as well as to their return, transformed, interconnected, political as they always were, in European imaginaries concerning ‘Muslims’ and ‘Jews’ today. Four further remarks warrant clarification of our approach in this issue:

1. On ‘Jews’ and ‘Muslims’ in inverted commas

Using inverted commas for figural language is a common practice, but the meaning of this practice in relation to antisemitism has been refined by Brian Klug, for whom the working definition of antisemitism as ‘hostility towards Jews as Jews’ should be revised.

It should be amended to read: hostility towards Jews as ‘Jews’ It would be more accurate (if cumbersome) to define the word along these lines: a form of hostility towards Jews as Jews, in which Jews are perceived as something other than what they are. Or more succinctly: hostility towards Jews as not Jews. For

the 'Jew' towards whom the antisemite feels hostile is not a *real* Jew at all. Thinking that Jews are really 'Jews' is precisely the core of antisemitism. Antisemitism is best defined not by an attitude to Jews but by a definition of 'Jew'.²¹

The 'Jews' from the title of this special issue are those imagined figures of thought that Klug is trying to delineate from 'real Jews'. We use the inverted commas in 'Muslims' analogously.²² In this issue, we complicate the understanding of the figure between the inverted commas, 'Jew', by studying how those 'Jews' have touched upon 'Muslims' and 'Arabs' as their counterparts in the European imaginaries (in connection to Semites, as Arab Jews and so on). Hence, the 'Jews' and the 'Muslims' from the title of this special issue are those imagined figures of thought that Klug was trying to capture in terms of 'Jews' in his analysis (while we do amend his distinction in one of our articles as well, see Jansen).

II. On the spelling of antisemitism

It is our preference in this issue to use the term 'antisemitism' without a hyphen. This is to underline that, while there is a historical linguistic category that brought together 'Semitic languages' (including Hebrew and Arabic), neither 'Semites' nor a phenomenon of 'Semitism' has ever existed—any more than 'Aryanism' has ever existed—except in constructions of the humanities from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and in the racial theories that evolved out of these early categorizations.²³ In the post-Enlightenment drive for classification, 'combining Biblical genealogy and Leibnizo-Linnaean linguistic classification',²⁴ German humanists came up with the category of 'Semites', which contained both biblical and cultural-historical connotations. The use of the term 'Semitic' derived from how these languages were traced to the biblical story of Noah's son Shem. Theological, biblical, linguistic, cultural-historical and, later on, racial dimensions were attendant on this category, which is one example of how biblical legacies were carried over into 'secular' scholarship in the early humanities. The racial dimension became particularly evident in Ernest Renan's work *Histoire des langues sémitiques* (1855), which constructed a notion of 'Semites' as a 'race

21 Brian Klug, 'The collective Jew: Israel and the new antisemitism', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2003, 117–38 (122, 123–4, original emphasis).

22 David Nirenberg also emphasizes the role of the 'Jews' as figures of thought in European intellectual Christian and secular traditions from early Christianity onwards. See Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*.

23 See discussions by Maurice Olender and Céline Trautmann-Waller referenced in footnote 17 of this introduction.

24 Trautmann-Waller, 'Semites and Semitism', 350. See also Reuven Firestone, 'Islamophobia and antisemitism: history and possibility', *Arches Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 7, 2010, 42–51; and Nasar Meer (ed.), *Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia* (London and New York: Routledge 2013).

sémitique' (in contrast to a 'race indoeuropéenne') as a category bringing together a group of peoples with a specific (and static) 'character' (again, in contrast to an Indo-European 'race').²⁵ The original German adjective 'antisemitisch' (antisemitic) was coined by the Jewish philologist Moritz Steinschneider to qualify Renan's characterization of Judaism in 1860.²⁶ The German noun 'Antisemit' (antisemite) was used for the first time when the Antisemitenliga (League of Antisemites) was founded in 1879 by the German polemicist Wilhelm Marr, whose anti-Jewish invective entitled *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum* (The victory of Judaism over Germanism), published the same year, introduced the neologism 'Antisemitismus'. Although this is a complicated genealogy with German, French and English terms involved, we think that spelling 'antisemitism' without a hyphen is preferable—note that only in English is there a hyphenated version of antisemitism—even if there is ample use of the category of the 'Semite' in the nineteenth-century literature.

However, there is a political ambivalence to the spelling of the term today that needs to be mentioned. A discussion about this spelling arose some years ago, partly because Microsoft's spell checker routinely changed 'antisemitism' to 'anti-Semitism'. In 2015, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) issued a 'Memo on the Spelling of Antisemitism' explaining why it preferred the spelling 'antisemitism'. After briefly outlining the nineteenth-century construction of the term 'Semitism', the memo stated: 'The term [antisemitism] has, however, since its inception referred to prejudice against Jews alone.'²⁷ The suggestion was that 'anti-Semitic', with a capital 'S', hints at a neglect of the history of the term as specifically related to hatred against Jews and Judaism, rather than against all (alleged but non-existing) Semites. While it is historically correct that the term 'Antisemitismus' in the work of Wilhelm Marr was directed against Jews in the German context where it developed into a movement, the term 'antisemite', as mentioned above, appeared in Steinschneider's critique of Renan, which concerned Jews and Muslims together as a 'race sémitique' and as Semites.

The history is too complicated and too painful to allow for one definitive stance. As may become clear from our brief genealogy above, insisting on using antisemitism without a capital 'S' may be exclusionary to the effect that there *has been* a relevant category bringing together Jews and Arabs/Muslims as objects of theorization about specific peoples with 'Semitic character traits'. Moreover, as is abundantly clear in this issue, there is critical scholarship today working with the term 'Semites' specifically to trace the

25 Djamel Kouloughli, 'Ernest Renan: un anti-sémitisme savant', *Histoire Épistémologie Langage*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2007, 91–112. Race, for Renan, was not a biological but a cultural-historical-linguistic category.

26 Moritz Steinschneider (ed.), *Hebräische Bibliographie: Blätter für neuere und ältere Literatur des Judenthums*, vol. 3, no. 13, 1860, 16.

27 IHRA, 'Memo on spelling of antisemitism', April 2015, available on the IHRA website at www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/memo-on-spelling-of-antisemitism_final-1.pdf (viewed 6 March 2020).

formation of a category bringing together Jews and Arabs in a way that tends to demonstrate Europe's forgetfulness of its role as an *active* third party—first bringing together Arabs and Jews in an Orientalist category and then splitting them again into two 'kinds' of Semites—instead of as just a 'neutral' bystander.²⁸ Much of the work in this special issue can only help to trace this complicated history, and how it has operated outside of Western Europe (as in the articles by Ella Shohat and Gil Hochberg). Scholars and others interested in re-membering that particular history might therefore in our view legitimately be more inclined towards using 'anti-Semitism'.

III. On the race–religion nexus

According to Charles Taylor, social imaginaries are made up of the *practice* of people understanding and constructing social surroundings in terms of 'images, stories, and legends'.²⁹ For Taylor it is a 'common understanding' that leads to a widely shared 'sense of legitimacy' but, as Pnina Werbner argues, this is a historical and not only a presently focused activity. Without putting it in these terms, what Werbner stresses is the need for a genealogical excavation of the provenance of social imaginaries, which cannot be read off their contemporary function. For 'rather than simply rising and falling . . . imaginaries often persist over lengthy periods even in different historical circumstances, while continuously being amplified with new examples of aberrancy'.³⁰ We see this in what we call the race–religion nexus in Europe, something that is at the heart of a version of European modernity that saw Islam and Judaism become a staging post for progress. To what extent this flowed from a certain idea of modernity, and to what extent it reflected a reading of Islam and Judaism, are difficult to separate. But it is striking that the idea of Islam in the West 'occupied the peculiar place of historical opposition to both European Christianity *and* modernity'.³¹ If we fast-forward to the end of the twentieth century we easily find continuities in the way these two tendencies are run together. Perhaps the most well known is Samuel Huntington's (1996) thesis on a clash of civilizations. This is a much less opaque discussion about world history and consciousness, for it succinctly posits that 'the West was West long before it was Modern', specifically in so far as 'Western

28 Kalmar, Ivan 'Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: the formation of a secret'; Hochberg, "Remembering Semitism" or "On the Prospect of Re-Membering the Semites", 192–223.

29 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press 2004), 23.

30 Pnina Werbner, 'Folk devils and racist imaginaries in a global prism: Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in the twenty-first century', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, 450–67 (452).

31 Ian Almond, *History of Islam in German Thought: From Leibniz to Nietzsche* (London and New York: Routledge 2010), 153.

Christianity. . . is historically the single most important characteristic of Western civilisation'.³² Taken together, these sets of observations remind us how our concepts of Islam and modernity have very much relied on underlying frames of geopolitical decline and European advance, in which Christianity is a prevailing reference point.³³

IV. *On genealogical entanglements*

It has been a guiding concern for the contributors to this special issue to reflect on the entanglement of the theological, philosophical, racial *and*, importantly, contemporary political contexts of the genealogies of 'Jews' and 'Muslims'. Social imaginaries of the race–religion nexus in Europe, the United States, Israel and a host of Muslim countries are discursively intertwined here. Thus, in Esther Romeyn's words in this issue, when writing about antisemitism in its specific context today:

My interest is not so much in the 'facts' of antisemitism or 'new' antisemitism, but in the ways in which it functions as a 'power-knowledge' field in which a cast of actors—global governance actors, such as the United Nations, UNESCO, the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, the European Union Commission, non-governmental organizations, experts and scholars, and politicians—set out to define, invent measuring tools and technologies, analyse, formulate policy statements and programmes, and develop 'interventions' to address and redress ('fight') the 'problem'.

32 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1996), 69, 70.

33 The complicating factor is that this also has a racial logic to it (see Meer, 'Islamophobia and postcolonialism'). The historical literature on whiteness provides an understanding of the ways in which 'the history of whiteness is one of transitions and changes', as well as the ways in which this history also serves as 'a geography' of the West (*ibid.*). Alastair Bonnett, 'Whiteness and the West', in Claire Dwyer and Caroline Bressy (eds), *New Geographies of Race and Racism* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2008), 17–28 (18). While 'white' and 'western' are often conflated in contemporary discussion, according to Bonnet, the idea that the 'West' has a coherent unity, something resembling an 'ethno-cultural repertoire' of whiteness, is a relatively novel conception that owes much (though not necessarily in a straightforward manner) to late nineteenth-century writers who anxiously debated the 'decline' of white dominance (Bonnett, 'Whiteness and the West', 23). Among others, in 'Whiteness and the West', Bonnett identifies Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution* (1894) and *Principles of Western Civilisation* (1902), each of which prefigure the current theories of Eurabia and European decline discussed elsewhere. Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009); Benjamin Kidd, *Principles of Western Civilization* (New York: Macmillan 1902). See Meer, 'Semantics, scales and solidarities in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia'.

To put it a little more generally, we address the complexity and actuality of the genealogies of 'Jews' and 'Muslims' in the context of rising Islamophobic populism, antisemitism and an increasingly strong emphasis on the so-called Christian, Judaeo-Christian or secular (modern or post-Enlightenment) names for Europe. Images and concepts of 'Jews' and 'Muslims', of antisemitism and Islamophobia, are being deployed in these highly complex and politicized contemporary contexts, in which we cannot assume their meaning or catch them transhistorically in a single definition. Instead, we analyse these concepts and their genealogies in specific cultural-political contexts in which they can shift their meanings and acquire new shapes.

This special issue is a collective attempt at understanding but, at the same time, at formulating social and cultural criticism as well. Each of us is trying to make a critical intervention in the current European climate of rising populism, antisemitism and Islamophobia, including critiquing all problematic uses of these terms and many others related to this field (such as 'radicalization', see De Koning in this issue). We hope this is one of the strong elements in this issue as a collective work. Finally, the humanities are traditionally very aware of the symbolic, imaginary and historical dimensions of the words, concepts and images we use, and the meanings we give to our practices. Humanists, with their noses in books and artworks, know what terrible, odd, ridiculous and only sometimes wise ideas have guided European imaginaries of their Others. Anthropologists and social scientists, then, study the actual ways in which people deal (more or less creatively or effectively) with those ideas and their legacies in practical situations. We hope that bringing together scholars from the humanities, anthropologists and sociologists will have helped to paint a fuller and more challenging picture.

Yolande Jansen is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam and Special Professor of Humanism in Relation to Religion and Secularity for the Socrates Foundation at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. She is the author of *Secularism, Assimilation and the Crisis of Multiculturalism: French Modernist Legacies* (Amsterdam 2014) and co-editor (with Joost de Bloois and Robin Celikates) of *The Irregularization of Migration in Europe: Detention, Deportation, Drowning* (Rowman & Littlefield 2015). Jansen also contributed an article analysing the rise of religio-secularism in scholarship and international politics to the *Oxford Handbook of Secularism* (2017). Email: y.jansen@uva.nl

Nasar Meer holds a Chair in Race, Identity and Citizenship at the University of Edinburgh, and is the Principle Investigator of the JPI ERA Net / Horizon 2020 GLIMER project, examining the governance and local integration of migrants and Europe's refugees. He is Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* and his books include *Whiteness and Nationalism* (ed. 2020), *The Impact Agenda: Challenges and Controversies* (co-authored 2020), *Islam and Modernity* (4 vols, ed. Routledge 2017), *Interculturalism and*

Multiculturalism: Debating the Dividing Lines (co-ed. Edinburgh 2016), *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism: The Rise of Muslim Consciousness* (Palgrave 2015, 2nd edn), *Racialization and Religion* (ed. Routledge 2014), *Key Concepts in Race and Ethnicity* (Sage 2014) and *European Multiculturalism(s)* (co-ed. Edinburgh 2012). He is a recipient of the Royal Society of Edinburgh Thomas Reid Medal for excellence in the social sciences, an elected Fellow of Scotland's National Academy (FRSE) and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences (FACSS). Email: Nasar.Meer@ed.ac.uk