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Judeo-Christianity, Jewish Barbarism and the Necessity to Decolonize Jewishness

Yonathan Listik

Introduction

He said to them: What must a man do and ensure that he will be accepted by people? They said to Alexander: He must hate the king and the authorities and avoid becoming too close to those in power. ...

He said to them: Who among you is wiser than the others? They said to him: We are all equal in wisdom, as every matter that you say to us, we solve for you unanimously. He said to them: What is the substance of this stance, by which you, the Jewish people, oppose me? Since you are my subjects, and my people constitute the majority, you should concede that our lifestyle is superior. They said to him: Your dominance is inconsequential, as sometimes even the Satan is victorious, by convincing people to act in a manner that is clearly incorrect.¹

For a large period of European history, the figure of the Jew was undeniably constructed as a figure of otherness. Today Jewish cultural heritage seems to have become an integral part of the Western hegemonic narrative of Judeo-Christianity.² In this prism, the integration of “the Jew” into mainstream culture is presented as an accomplishment of western modernity that has developed into a multicultural project that no longer excludes its “others.” In this reading, the idea of reconciliation brushes over, if not erases the historically and, as I will argue, still relevant ambivalent position of the Jewish other. As Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus recognize, this ambivalence is inextricably tied to Jewish history and culture, then and now, since it is “both at the heart of western metropolitan culture and ... also ... excluded in order for ascendant racial and sexual identities to be formed and maintained.”³

This essay questions the figure of the “integrated” Jew and wishes to show that the logic of the discourse around Judeo-Christianity continues to only ground a *conditional acceptance* or *tolerance* of the Jew. In this logic, the construct of the Jew serves discursively for the advancement of Western civilization.

¹ Dialogue between Alexander the Great and the Elder of the Negev in Babylonian Talmud, *Tamid* 32a [Bold is original without textual contextualization].

² Anya Topolski, “A Genealogy of the ‘Judeo-Christian’ Signifier: A Tale of Europe’s Identity Crisis,” in *Is there a Judeo-Christian Tradition?*, ed. Anya Topolski and Nathan Emmanuel (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 2016), 267-83.

³ Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, eds., *Modernity, Culture and ‘the Jew’* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

Furthermore, I aim to demonstrate that if Jewish voices resist this contribution-al place to which the Jew is assigned, then they are accused of disloyalty and ungratefulness, which once again places them into the position of an “internal” enemy.⁴ Despite the ostensible contradiction, a common logic connects the opposite attitudes of excluding the Jew from the construction of a national identity and, at the same time, including her history and culture as the basis of the moral compass of the new civilized and modern world. In both, the invocation of the Jew serves as a discursive strategy, a tool without agency or a voice.

The essay does not aim to determine whether Jewish culture has or has not become an integral part of the self-portrayal of the modern West; but is rather interested in the manner and conditions of such integration. While recognizing that the situation of Jews has significantly changed after World War II and that the “Semitic threat” moved, in particular, post-9/11 mainly to Muslims, I challenge the notion that the “Jewish case” is solved.⁵ On the contrary, I argue that it is precisely in this liminal situation of an “almost” or “practical” normality that the configuration can be viewed as aggravated rather than resolved. The conclusion I draw rejects the lamenting of a shortcoming of the integration, but rather *resists* it, since there is a continuity of Othering and anti-Semitism that, despite all its modifications, persists. In this manner, Jewishness holds the potential to represent a form of critique of the normative standards of society and of the history of Western modernity.

In his book *The End of Jewish Modernity*, Enzo Traverso argues that a conservative turn in Jewish political positioning ended the representation of Jews as the central figure of otherness in western political discourse.⁶ For Traverso, anti-Semitism changed after the Shoah and the foundation of the State of Israel from the persecution of Jews as part of the process of nation-building in Europe, to a morally deplorable posture that secures a western “civilized” self-image.⁷ Based on that claim, I present a caveat to his conclusion by drawing attention to the fact that even though the memory of the Shoah gained a crucial position in post-WWII Western discourse, it is often used in an instrumentalized and conditional way. As Traverso himself already points out in his assessment of the way the Holocaust is treated within hegemonic discourse, but without fully

⁴ See Anidjar for this dynamic: Jew as internal other, Arab as external other of Europe. Anidjar, Gil. “On the European Question.” *Belgrade Journal of Media and Communications* 2, no. 3 (2013): 37-50.

⁵ Anya Topolski, “Rejecting Judeo-Christian Privilege: The First Step Towards Semitic Solidarity,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 27, no.3 (2020), 317. An investigation into the reasons engendering this impasse via an investigation into the logic where, despite (or to large extent because of) its inclusive discourse liberalism/modernity is imperialistic and colonizing, is beyond the scope of the thesis here. The argument here merely wishes to pinpoint the tension and an alternative perspective on it.

⁶ Enzo Traverso, *The End of Jewish Modernity* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 4.

⁷ Ibid, 85; 115-17.

developing on the ramifications that are highlighted here: “Memory has lost its critical potential; it has become a monument.”⁸

A main motivation for advancing the argument proposed here is the underlying thesis that overlooking the existence of anti-Semitism today is both naïve and dangerous. In a larger critical scope, it allows for its weaponization, i.e., its employment against a counter-hegemonic posture on behalf of the hegemonic discourse, and it relies on an underlying faith that modernity as a project can be fulfilled. For instance, returning to Traverso’s assessment of the “new” Islamophobia post 9-11, I would argue that it reproduces well-known anti-Semitic tropes and perpetuates a civilizing imperative that is associated with the integrationist/liberal project of Judeo-Christianity.⁹

This dynamic appears, for instance, in a recent opinion column in one of Brazil’s most famous newspapers, *Folha de São Paulo*, which argued for the dangers of “reverse racism” and the oppressive posture of those “seemly” marginalized communities by mentioning that black communities in Brazil hold anti-Semitic beliefs and hence discriminate against white people.¹⁰

One finds the problematic entanglement, as in the weaponization of anti-Semitism, in the implication emerging from the argument that the so-called marginalized hold the power to discriminate and, moreover, are now even more powerful than the normative order since their power to discriminate is largely taken as acceptable or a mode of self-defence; whereas “traditional” forms of discrimination (anti-Semitism/racism/sexism/homophobia...) are surpassed in current liberal logic and hence no longer tolerated by the hegemonic order. The underlying thesis is that the hegemonic order is in danger and should defend itself against its supposed victims – victims who are in fact the real aggressors.

As it surfaces from this case, and as will be fully developed in the course of my argument, anti-Semitic postures today must be viewed as part of the logic of modernity and its civilizational implementations in its attempts to “eliminate” the uncivilized. The fact that those marginalized by civilization reproduce its problematic hegemonic postures as well is neither surprising nor unprecedented, but the argument here aims to emphasize that one must trace the logic to its roots rather than fall for the hegemonic trap of civilizational discourse.

In his book *Decolonial Judaism*, Santiago Slabodsky extends the presentation of Jewish history beyond Europe, which enables him to analyse the similarities between the Western othering of Jews and other victimized groups.¹¹ His reading of modern history includes a three-stage account of European imperial-

⁸ Ibid, 125.

⁹ Ibid, 95.

¹⁰ Folha, “Antonio Risério: Racismo De Negros Contra Brancos Ganha Força Com Identitarismo,” *Folha De S.Paulo*, January 16, 2022, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/2022/01/racismo-de-negros-contra-brancos-ganha-forca-com-identitarismo.shtml>.

¹¹ Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (New York: Springer, 2014), 51, 62-63.

ism from a Latin American perspective¹²: the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula, the colonization of America and its indigenous population, and the exploitation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.¹³ Similarly to Traverso's affirmation of the link between modern anti-Semitism and the development of racism as an imperialist ideology,¹⁴ Slabodsky demonstrates a continuous thread from the blood purity laws, imposed during the Inquisition, until the Holocaust. The argument here stretches this logic further to argue that this common thread does not end with the Holocaust but continues in different forms in contemporary hegemonic logic. Despite important differences, the driving force behind emancipation and civilization that had legitimized previous violence remains alive in the contemporary imperative to be civilized, that is to be integrated into western hegemony.

Given its bloody history, and using Slabodsky's idea of barbarism, I propose to challenge integration and belonging and argue that Jews are, and never stopped being, "barbarians."¹⁵ Even if their constructed position has shifted, and even if Jews are among civilization's greatest defenders, the persistent existence of anti-Semitism demonstrates that the tension still exists. The essay will not engage in a comparative assessment of "barbarians", it merely wishes to highlight the existence of discrimination against Jews as a relevant factor and not a minor "hang-up" from previous stereotypes. I posit that anti-Semitism emerges from the logic of a universal civilization: the push to modernize and implement liberal values rather than the resistance to it. This civilizatory narrative today, under the guise of "Philo-Semitic" reaction to its previous crimes, presents itself as a Judeo-Christian project.

Jewish Barbarism

Memmi opens the final chapter of the *Liberation of the Jew* with the distinction between his inquiry and his wish: "My book, in some way, ends here since I have completed the inventory of the Jewish condition."¹⁶ This condition is defined by him as a colonial condition where Jews, similarly to any colonized group, absorb the colonial image of themselves and naturalize it as their identity. Briefly, the idea of Jewishness is not one that develops from an autonomous and impartial cultural process but one that is marked by Jewish submission

¹² Enrique D. Dussel, Javier Krauel and Virginia C. Tuma, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000), 474.

¹³ Santiago Slabodsky, "In Network: The case for decolonial Jewish thought," *Politics and Religion Journal* 10, no. 2 (2016): 151-71 [See especially 158f].

¹⁴ Enzo Traverso, *The Jewish Question: History of a Marxist Debate* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2018), 55.

¹⁵ This category will be constructed in the next section.

¹⁶ Albert Memmi, *The Liberation of the Jew* (London: Orion Press, 1966), 282.

to colonial powers. In this sense, the persistence of the diasporic element in Jewishness taints the possibility that it develops into an autonomous and liberated identity.

As a response to his “inquiry” he moves into a defense of Jewish nationalism as a form of solving this issue—liberating the Jews as the title proposes. In this manner his defense of Israel does not emerge from a principled support of nationalism but rather from a pragmatic perspective. He even talks about it as a waste: “Even if we leave to one side this insoluble historical controversy, consequences of this choice have been terrible: what a price to pay! What an extraordinary waste of energy in an endeavor which was itself so demanding!”¹⁷ In other words, Israel serves a purpose, and this purpose is the decolonization of Jewishness. For Memmi, at least at this stage, Israel must be a counter-hegemonic construction that allows Jews to develop out of their diasporic identities and hence out of the hegemonic and civilizatory discourses.

Slabodsky points out that Memmi takes a position that places him within counter-hegemonic discourses comparable to the pragmatic adoption of nationalism for decolonial purposes as in the case of Leopold Senghor, the post-colonial theorist, political activist, and first prime minister of Senegal.¹⁸

While Memmi’s position ranges from the pragmatic employment of nationalism, to opposition to dominant discourses, to a more celebratory stance towards integration and tolerance within hegemonic environment, one can find in Isaac Deutscher similar but more continuous critical and radical opinions regarding the prospect of Jewish nationalism. Deutscher expresses a persistent suspicion regarding the promises of Western modernity: “I fear that we may be living in a fools’ paradise in our Western welfare state. The trustful feeling of freedom from anti-Semitism may well be one more illusion, a particularly Jewish one, engendered by our ‘affluent society’.”¹⁹ Deutscher rejects nationalism as an answer to the Jewish condition. He claims that after World War II, nationalism showed its final and most brutal face in the form of hyper-jingoist ideology: the subalterns seem to pick it up from the colonizer’s trashcan, which in a sense is a continuation of their secondary position or their reliance of the old dominators.²⁰

With this in mind, Memmi’s diagnosis seems to require a different solution. In other words, “normalization”, via the integration of local Jewish communities or the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel, is not the solution to the Jewish condition. Instead, a general suspicion of Judeo-Christian civilization is proposed in the idea of Jewish barbarism.

¹⁷ Memmi, *Liberation of the Jew*, 290.

¹⁸ Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism*, 132.

¹⁹ Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jews and Other Essays* (London: Verso Books, 2017), 814.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 95-97.

It is fundamental to highlight the dual sense of the employment of the term “barbarian” here. On the one hand, it has a descriptive connotation, denoting those who are alien to civilization. In this way, the employment of the concept serves as a general suspicion of the integration of Jews into the hegemonic order of Judeo-Christianity. Moreover, it suggests that due to the conditional integration, integration is not desirable and should potentially be resisted.

In this second, normative sense “barbarian” concerns the taking of a subjective position that refuses the benefits of universalistic hegemony in an act of epistemic disobedience.²¹ This epistemic disobedience is best illustrated by Dussel’s reproduction of Martín Fierro’s²² formula that “in my ignorance, I know that I am worth nothing.”²³ This nullification is the product of the violence imposed on him but from this ignorance (lack of *logos*/reason) emerges the counter-hegemonic posture of refusing the homogenization. As Dussel goes on to conclude: Otherness is not a form of comprehension but of incomprehension (i.e., ignorance/barbarity) and the new can only emerge from this nothing.²⁴

The term “barbarian” hence serves as the opposing force for what presents itself as reasonable, therefore naturalizing its logic. It refuses civilization in a radical sense, since it refuses to take its logic even as a benchmark. To dispute the meaning of rationality or to expand its limited scope would still accept the legitimacy of the imperative to be civilized rather than barbarian. It would merely dispute the meaning or content of such a civilized position. In fact, it is not surprising that the more “tolerant” the civilizatory discourse seems to become, the smaller the scope for opposing it becomes as a consequence of the imperative to be “reasonable” and “civilized” in one’s opposition. In other words, Jewishness can be accepted on the condition, or to the extent, that it is “reasonable” and aids in the advancement of hegemonic discourses. That is, it is

²¹ Slabodsky, for his part, mentions that natives and Africans were accused of being Jewish, and often accepted the accusation, since the term gained an iconoclastic sense (perhaps as a pejorative term on its own). See Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism*, 29; 34-35; 71. A similar account is provided by Segré’s reference to Meillassoux’s understanding of the slogan “we are all German Jews.” Alain Badiou, Eric Hazan and Ivan Segré, *Reflections on Anti-Semitism* (London: Verso Books, 2013), 150n15. Also, Daniel Boyarin compares Jewish unsuitability to the categories of ‘Judaism’ as a religion with the Chaco Canyon culture’s unsuitability and the imposition of ‘Judaism’ as category under colonial condition to the southern African case. Daniel Boyarin, *Judaism: The Genealogy of a Modern Notion* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 58 and 137-38. See Memmi *The Liberation of the Jew* for a similar argument in terms of coloniality.

²² A classic character of Argentinian folklore.

²³ Enrique D. Dussel and Daniel E. Guillot, *Liberación latinoamericana y Emmanuel Levinas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Bonum, 1975), 23.

²⁴ Dussel and Guillot, *Liberación latinoamericana*, 25-26. I find Dussel’s formulation stronger than Mignolo’s “learning to unlearn” but they are undoubtedly more connected than opposing. Walter D. Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience: the de-colonial option and the meaning of identity in politics,” *Gragoatá* 12, 22 (2007): 14.

accepted on the condition that it produces an exemplary modern citizen rather than a barbarian, thereby serving as proof for the civilizatory discourse.

Emphasizing a Jewish barbarian condition does not mean a return to an original Jewish position. Neither is it to demonstrate that there is such thing as a form of pure barbarism where one is either one or the other. As Glissant states, the colonized does not exist prior to colonization and its disorder is not the lack/absence of something but the very structure of colonization.²⁵

The barbarian lens defended here amounts to understanding the asymmetry of power and the violence of coloniality and denying it completely. It is not the impurity of a mixed middle ground that appeals to some engendered structure of communality (Judeo-Christianity), instead, it is defending the impurity of degeneration as a form of disruption.²⁶ It constitutes neither a safe space nor the creation of a hybrid third, hence avoiding the binarism, but the possibility of advocating a barbarian epistemology to the detriment of the colonial one as a mechanism of truly understanding and confronting anti-Semitism.²⁷

Contemporary Anti-Semitism and its Discontents

Moving beyond Slabodsky's historical account, this section focuses on contemporary cases of anti-Semitism to challenge the idea that post-war developments have (almost) fulfilled modernity's promises of tolerance and integration of the Jew. I will present examples to demonstrate that such discourses still employ a civilizatory narrative and that a common thread ties them to previous iterations of this narrative. The fundamental argument is that both are representative of a "civilized" posture that negates "barbarism" and hence exerts violence over it. The investigation will attempt to show that it is precisely in the advancement of such liberal values, especially when they are employed to supposedly protect Jews as members of this common project, that anti-Semitism becomes conspicuous.

An example is Alain Finkelkraut and Oriana Fallaci's support of Renaud Camus, when he claimed that Jews are overly present in the media.²⁸ It is fundamental to highlight here that Camus is the inventor of the term "great

²⁵ Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2020), 356-57.

²⁶ Glissant mentions the ideas of silt and alluvium to talk about the opacity in the mirror of modernity. An assessment of this connection remains beyond of the scope of text but nevertheless I want to highlight here an initial connection: "Opacities must be preserved; an appetite for opportune obscurity in translation must be created; and falsely convenient vehicular sabirs must be relentlessly refuted." Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 111 and 120.

²⁷ Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism*, 21. Slabodsky, "In Network: The case for decolonial Jewish thought," 166-67.

²⁸ Badiou et al., *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*, 325 and for a reproduction of Camus' statement see *ibid*, 324n1.

replacement” in his eponymous work from 2010, which refers to the idea that the “native” European populations, read “white”, are being replaced by non-native, read “immigrant”, populations under what is sometimes described as a purposeful project and sometimes as merely a tragedy that is allowed to occur. This term has become a common formula in right wing discourses and is even employed by Eric Zemmour, an openly Jewish politician.

Now, Camus does not refer to the Jewish population and perhaps would even include them in the “native” population and present the Shoah as precisely the break from this undeniable fraternity. Still, one would have to be extremely naïve and creative to disconnect his arguments from the white supremacist slogan: “Jews will not *replace* us.” One thing is certain: the white supremacists most certainly do not see their perspectives and Camus’ as two different positions as they constantly refer to the concept of “great replacement”.

Returning to Fallaci, one can find this same logic of attacks on Jews being excused on behalf of a larger protection of civilization in her attacks of LICRA (a “leftist” Jewish association) who, together with a Muslim NGO, sued her in France for her discriminatory statements by claiming: “Yes, now I do understand those ungrateful Jews of “LICRA”. Now I do. Collaborationism is always born of fear. Yet their case reminds me of the German Jewish bankers who, hoping to save themselves, in the Thirties lent money to Hitler. And who, despite this, ended up in the ovens.”²⁹

The latent and open anti-Semitism here does not require any further interpretation, but it is important to emphasize the same imperative alignment with civilization, which turns into accusations of betrayal at the slightest challenge. This is not an isolated case, since in her comments in her trial in the Swiss court, she lists a series of other “victims” such as Holocaust revisionists and animal rights activists who opposed Halal slaughtering by claiming it is a “barbaric” ritual.³⁰ She is fully aware of the ramifications of her statements: “[Halal butchery is barbaric] to the same extent as *schechitah* or kosher butchery.”³¹ Very clearly for her, Jews are only useful when they are collaborators to her project, otherwise, they are enemies. Moreover, that is not surprising since they are “barbarian to the same extent” as the Muslims. Once again, irony does not go to waste, since despite accusing the “Jews of LICRA” of collaborationism parallel to the those who collaborated with the Nazis,³² it is she who, voluntarily one must emphasize, places herself in the collective that includes Holocaust Revisionists — Nazi sympathizers to give them their proper name. In other

²⁹ Cited in Badiou et al., *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*, 341.

³⁰ Badiou et al., *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*, 343.

³¹ Cited in Badiou et al., *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*, 343.

³² Which is historically suspicious one must say, but it does explain or reinforce her sympathy for Holocaust revisionists.

words, she openly states that she is being “persecuted” for the same “crimes” as those people: her project is their project.

Hence, it is not surprising that in her books Fallaci never mentions Auschwitz and only once the notion of “extermination camps”, even though she prides herself on her background in the resistance to fascism. Her open opposition to a Jewish-centered account of Nazism is related to her argument that the Holocaust happened to civilization and not on behalf of civilization. Strangely enough, in this context Jews are victims only under the condition that they behave as part of that civilization. For Fallaci it seems that Auschwitz is not relevant because, as in the revisionist narrative of her fellow “victims”, the “victimhood” of those who died there is conditional on the larger project of protecting civilization and can be freely revised.

Hypothetically one can imagine that upon being questioned, Fallaci would not deny the importance of Auschwitz but the point that is being made here calls attention to the logic constructed in her employment: Jewish oppression has no value in and of itself but only as a mechanism of constructing a larger narrative. It merely makes use of the figure of the Jew, but it seems the Jews are replaceable when convenient. Moreover, considering the fact that she, like Camus, often points out how inconvenient they seem to be, perhaps allows for the reasonable conclusion that they should be “replaced” considering how “ungrateful” they are; not they would ever defend such position explicitly since anti-Semitism is obviously abhorrent in their view.

In this context, a text by Brazilian jurist Miguel Reale from 1934 entitled *Integralism and the Jews*³³ is harrowing. Reale was a member of the integralist party, the Brazilian openly fascist association, and occupied several prominent positions during and after the military dictatorship, including rector of the São Paulo University and justice secretary. He lived and died without facing any consequences for his actions and beliefs and to this day is honored with rooms in Law school campuses.

In his text, Reale argues that racism was never an element of their ideology, and even in Nazi Germany the idea of blood purity is replaced by the idea of honor or loyalty to the nation. In a meritocratic posture *avant la lettre*, he states that Integralism judges a man merely by his accomplishments and actions. In this manner, Jews are not essentially problematic if they too integrate into Brazilian society and serve to enhance its civilization. In other words, Jews’ acceptance is conditional. To prove his point he cites the leader of the Integralist movement who in an interview with a rabbi stated that it is only natural that Integralists respond when attacked by “Semite” elements who abuse the laws and take advantage of them to interfere in Brazil: “In the same manner that Jews ask what are the position of the Integralists towards them, the Integralist

³³ <https://integralismo.org.br/documentos/o-integralismo-e-os-judeus/>.

ask what are the interest of the Jews in Brazil. For us the issue is not racial but moral...Honest Jews are deserving of our praise.”³⁴

Obviously, this form of conditioning is clearly discriminatory but the point I wish to highlight with this example is that its incompatibility with liberal values is merely an appearance. This obligation to be civilized that appears in Reale’s position to a great extent remains a justified and accepted position today. In other words, Reale shows that fascism wanted nothing more than to advance the “modern liberal” values of development and is nothing but “tolerant” in its attitudes. Reale explains Fallaci and Camus, and demonstrates the persistence of previous structures of violence while claiming their supposed disappearance under liberalism.

In other words, just like for Fallaci, Jews are welcomed if they advance the nation and do not “destroy the spiritual values of the Christian civilization,” or serve global “bankerism” (financial capital), or are not communist spies.³⁵ The usage of the negative form in his discourse is fundamental since the implication is that those who fit the description are the exception to the rule. In that sense, Integralism provides a non-essential criterion for acceptance with the implication that only few fulfil those requirements, and the rest are enemies and must be eliminated.

It is important to highlight that Fallaci’s discourse adds a layer to Reale since she openly states that she speaks on behalf of the Jews and in their defence against their enemies and against “internal” traitors. The implication is that she is a greater protector of the Jews than those Jewish traitors who attack her. One finds in Philo-Semitism this imperative to be civilized and the legitimisation of attacks on those who refuse this logic (barbarians): in this logic Jews *must* be integrated into Judeo-Christianity.

Reale’s position serves as great transition to the last case that will be assessed: Brazil under Bolsonaro, illustrated by cases such as the public video where the previous culture minister reproduced both language and aesthetics of Goebbels or Bolsonaro’s political base’s alliances/proximity to Nazism or even explicit reference to anti-Semitic tropes such as the blood libel. For instance, the minister claimed he was unaware of the references and a conspiracy emerged arguing that he was framed by infiltrated opposition agents, serving only to further aggravate the anti-Semitic tone rather than dismiss it. This is hardly an outstanding case, and here, as in other instances, the local Jewish community almost unanimously rose in opposition.

³⁴ <https://integralismo.org.br/documentos/o-integralismo-e-os-judeus/>.

³⁵ One cannot ignore the date of the text and his argument about the situation in Germany. As he openly states, Alfred Rosenberg’s “exaggerations” about the importance of race were fading away into a discourse similar to the one he was advancing. Hence one can safely speculate that he would argue that ‘good’ Jews would have nothing to fear in 1934 Germany as well.

While the Israeli ambassador mainly refrains from criticism towards its political ally Bolsonaro, the local Jewish community has faced accusations of betrayal and secret alliances with the left because it presents a resistance. Its “status” as victim or even the legitimacy of the danger it feels, is conditioned on its cooperation but, as the Brazilian situation seems to show, it is never cooperating enough. Regardless of how well integrated and “hegemonic” the discourse is, it is never sufficiently so. Or at least, not sufficient enough to grant it the legitimacy to raise its concerns unconditionally. Reale’s text seems still timely, because it presents this meritocratic logic of intolerance and the ways in which it is not a disruption from previous logics.

Returning to the construction of Judeo-Christianity, to challenge its historical construction and contemporary employment,³⁶ I want to point to different configurations of this discourse beyond Europe and the United States. Against a position that sees the integration of Jews (either in a celebratory or critical manner), the argument here wants to show that this position constitutes a fool’s paradise that, as Deutscher claims, characterizes affluent societies. In other words, there is a certain eurocentrism/north-americanism to the integration account that is problematic.³⁷

Against this possible optimism, the argument here follows Anidjar’s argument³⁸ regarding the violent nature of liberal values: “It extends its universal reach by spreading its peculiar benevolence far and wide (‘Poor and rich are equally forbidden to spend the night under the bridges,’ as Anatole France had it), by building walls and establishing frontiers, at once internal and external, which is to say that ‘when frontiers are decided, the adversary is not simply annihilated; indeed, he is accorded rights, even when the victor’s superiority is

³⁶ Anya Topolski, “Rejecting Judeo-Christian Privilege: The First Step Towards Semitic Solidarity,” 303. Hence the difference between her argument and the one presented here is not substantial but empirical: whereas she seems optimistic about the extent to which this ‘alliance’ exists despite its fragility, I argue that the ‘cracks’ are too big and oblique to be ignored, especially because not ignoring them actively demonstrates something important: the fragility of the project as whole.

³⁷ In other words, the argument here is an attempt to ‘return the gaze’ against a dominant discourse of the issues highlighted in this paper: “For generations now, philosophers and thinkers shaping the nature of social science have produced theories embracing the entirety of humanity. As we well know, these statements have been produced in relative, and sometimes absolute, ignorance of the majority of humankind, i.e., those living in non-Western cultures. This in itself is not paradoxical for the more self-conscious of European philosophers have always sought theoretically to justify this stance. The everyday paradox of third-world social science is that we find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of ‘us’, eminently useful in understanding our societies. What allowed the modern European sages to develop such clairvoyance with regard to societies of which they were empirically ignorant? Why cannot we, once again, return the gaze?” in Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Provincializing Europe: Postcoloniality and the critique of history,” *Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (1992): 332.

³⁸ Gil Anidjar, “On the European question,” *Belgrade Journal of Media and Communications* 2, no. 3 (2013): 18n11, 26.

complete. And these are, in a demonically ambiguous way, ‘equal’ rights.”³⁹ Or returning to Topolski’s warning: Judeo-Christianity is a Christian privilege that can be extended, and the argument here aimed to show the limited extension to which it was, but more importantly, it can be as easily revoked.

The cases I presented here cannot be dismissed as merely anecdotal or peripheral to a central logic. This dismissal would be equivalent to commenting on the precarity of neoliberalism by referring exclusively to the UK and Thatcher’s government, where the situation is reasonably not drastic when compared to other places like Chile. With the risk of drawing an overly broad generalization, one must tackle those issues within a global common logic rather than separate or disconnected logics: neither the UK nor Chile in isolation but the effects of the UK on Chile and vice-versa. Or returning to the case at hand: not Judeo-Christianity as exclusively a Western idea or at best one that receives iterations in other parts of the globe, but as a Western idea that is effective around the globe as much as it returns to itself (even if to a smaller extent).⁴⁰

This is clearly illustrated by Bielik-Robson’s assessment of Poland’s contemporary employment of Judeo-Christianity where she opens her argument by stating that: “This essay is a gentle reminder that there are still places in the world where the Jew, far from having dissolved into a hegemonic majority, still functions as the primary figure of the Other: the other either to be hated or to be loved, but rarely to become a friend.”⁴¹ Or, as she later emphasizes, they are friends only in the Carl Schmitt sense of opposing “a common enemy” hence serving a purpose as it was argued here.⁴² Bielik-Robson describes an extremely similar scenario, where Jewish figures are often employed to demonstrate Poland’s overcoming of its history and the construction of a conservative nationalist identity, but immediately chastised when they present a challenge to the way this narrative is being constructed, often due to its employment of the same anti-Semitic tropes of previous historical periods.⁴³ The conclusion of the story is specifically emblematic here: a central right-wing politician made a clearly anti-Semitic comment associating Jews with the control of the economy and the conservative Jewish “allies” responded critically. The problematic nature of the “alliance” is revealed by the fact that not only they were put in their place within conservative hierarchy, afterwards the two main characters of her account who were previously identified as proud leaders of the Polish

³⁹ Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 12.

⁴⁰ In the same way that the neoliberal policies that were implemented in the ‘laboratory’ in Chile returned ‘home’.

⁴¹ Agata Bielik-Robson, “Other, not Hostile: On Allo-Semitism, Identitarianism, Marranism and the Two Visions of Jewish Diaspora,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2020): 178.

⁴² Ibid, 185.

⁴³ Ibid, 183-84.

Jewish community end up converting to Catholicism and fully embracing Judeo-Christianity.⁴⁴

Conclusion

This final scenario is made urgent by drawing an historical parallel via the figures of Hans-Joachim Schoeps and Gino Arias to illustrate that even though the context has undoubtedly changed, it remains possible to point at commonalities and alert to the lessons that could be extracted from them. Gino Arias is cited by Reale as an exemplary good Jew who is welcomed in the Integralist ranks.⁴⁵ Arias was a member of the fascist association who converted to Christianity and became a Thomist scholar. He was able to survive the Fascist repression of Jews for longer than those around him but inevitably had to flee to Argentina in 1939, never abandoning his Thomist ideologies. Schoeps was the leader of the Jewish support organisation for Hitler. Like Arias, he was able to flee in 1938 but his family perished. Upon his return to Germany, he resumed his conservative activities even among “former” Nazis.⁴⁶ His relevance for the context here emerges from the fact that, without the slightest irony, he serves, along with Finkelkraut, as reference and inspiration for the Jewish section of the AfD. In other words, he serves as an example of how Jews should align with civilization against barbarism. The contradiction presented in him is precisely the contradiction this text tries to highlight in the idea of a Judeo-Christian civilization. A contradiction that would seem comic if one would be able to ignore the tragic effects it has created and still creates. As North American Jews or Brazilian Jews might testify, today they no longer enjoy the sense of safety they once enjoyed.

In light of Deutscher’s previous warning that integration would be a fool’s paradise, one must return to Memmi’s project of decolonizing Jewishness and reconsider that nationalism or any other form of integrating Jewish life into a hegemonic discourse did not and does not solve the Jewish condition. This inclusion remains a gesture of tolerance that preserves the structures of power—Jews are tolerated and can even form part of the hegemonic logic, but they

⁴⁴ Ibid, 186.

⁴⁵ Reale also mentions Benjamin Disraeli as an acceptable Jew, in opposition to the obvious cases of Trotsky and Rothschild. In addition to the evident commonality that both his positive examples are Jews who assisted in the advancement of civilizational colonial projects and imperialism, it is essential to highlight that both converted to Christianity. In other words, abandoned their Jewishness of behalf of the larger Judaeo-Christian project hence reinforcing the overarching argument here.

⁴⁶ To be as clear as possible, those were not Nazis who openly repented for their actions but ones that merely hid their alliances well and sometimes not so well but nevertheless society pretended not to see it.

are never the protagonists of such discourse, they can use the discourse but do not own it. Moreover, such integration reproduces the colonial dynamic since it preserves the civilizatory imposition of previous oppressive dynamics, i.e., the violent elimination of barbarity inherent to the obligation to be civilized. In this regard, it should not be surprising that those who highlight this integration based on Judeo-Christianity flirt with anti-Semitism by demonstrating their discomfort with the abundant presence of the Judeo in the Judeo-Christian.

On a concluding note, and in light of the failure of his proposed solution, this essay ends with a paraphrasing of Memmi's words replacing "Israel" with the term "decoloniality" since Israel for him is a means of achieving this objective: "If decoloniality did not exist it would have to be created. If decoloniality should disappear [and I am arguing that it did in the Jewish case] it would have to be re-created. For decoloniality alone can put an end to the negativity of the Jew and liberate his positivity."⁴⁷ Jewish decoloniality already exists because Memmi created it, now it is time to re-create it in the form of Jewish barbarism as a threat to civilization. Liberating Jewishness means employing it to disrupt Judeo-Christianity: to escape the colonial submission of Jewishness to a sphere suitable to a grand colonial narrative – as comfortable and safe as it might seem, it will always be a fool's paradise.

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⁴⁷ Memmi, *Liberation of the Jew*, 294

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