



Human Rights and Anti-Semitism after GAZA

Ramón Grosfoguel

University of California, Berkeley

grosfogu@berkeley.edu

Abstract: This article discusses the consequences of the latest Israeli massacres in Gaza in relation to its global consequences for Human Rights and Global Anti-Semitism today. The first part is a discussion of the consequences of Gaza towards Human Rights. The second part is a discussion of the consequences of Gaza towards global anti-semitism. The last part is a discussion about Fundamentalism in the world today, in particular on the hegemonic, silent and pervasive form of fundamentalism: Eurocentric fundamentalism.

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I. HUMAN RIGHTS AFTER GAZA

Any discussion of Human Rights today needs to acknowledge the following three postulates:

1st Postulate: Human Rights in the mid 20th century is a continuation of the Western Global/Colonial designs of Rights of People in the 16th century and Rights of Man in the 18th century.

As part of its global/colonial designs the West built over several centuries diverse global/colonial discourses that shifted overtime.

First, the Rights of People in the 16th century was Vitoria's, Sepulveda's and Las Casas' problem as part of the Spanish empire's colonization of the Americas. Their problem was how to define the people they encounter in the Americas. The debate over Rights of People was inside the ecclesiastical elites of the Spanish empire without ever considering the colonial subjects' will and points of views. However, it became the main discourse of the European colonial expansion during Spanish hegemony of the world-system in the 16th century. The discourse about Rights of People was from the beginning tied to a Universalist project defined provincially from a Christian-centric cosmology.

Ramón Grosfoguel is Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and a Senior Research Associate of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris. He has published on the political economy of the world-system and on Caribbean migrations to Western Europe and the United States. His most recent book is *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (University of California Press, 2003). Most recently he was co-editor, with Eric Mielants, of a special issue of the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* (Vol. 47, Aug. 2006) on Minorities, Racism and Cultures of Scholarship. Eric Mielants is Assistant Professor in Sociology in the College of Arts and Sciences at Fairfield University. He has written articles and essays on racism, social theory and contemporary migration issues. His book, *The Origins of Capitalism and the 'Rise of the West'*, is forthcoming from Temple University Press.

Second, once Rights of People was defined, Rights of Man became the new global/colonial design in the new secular Enlightenment project of the 18th century. The Enlightenment's Rights of Man continued the Western-centric and patriarchal concept of the Human that began with Rights of People. Women of all colors and non-Western peoples were not included in the concept of Rights of Man. As Eze (1997) and Mignolo (2000) have discussed at great length, the Kantian project of the transcendental subject and Rights of Man became more clearly stated in Kant's Anthropological writings. Kant conceived the White race as superior to the other races and the only one with access to reason. Behind the door of Kant's transcendental subject, hides a White Man. A few centuries later, Human Rights emerged in the mid-Twentieth Century as a new discourse under US hegemony in a context where overt forms of colonialism were already defeated by anti-colonial struggles in the Third World. Human Rights continued and combined elements of the Rights of People and Rights of Man in the new developmentalist project of the post-colonial era inaugurated by the rise of US hegemony in the World-System. The first article of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights says:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

The concept of "human beings" used here like the concept of people and man before had Universal pretensions but provincially defined and narrowly applied. Without decolonizing the concept of the "human" from a Western-centric patriarchal gaze and without decolonizing the global coloniality of power from the hegemony of Euro-American White Supremacy as the leading country of the postwar Western Im-

perialist United Front, it was simply impossible to have a more cosmopolitan and multi-epistemic concept of human rights and to even implement the present hegemonic concept of human rights in a fair and coherent way. From the Korean War in the early fifties to the most recent Iraqi War, human rights were always a privilege of the West and only mobilized in non-Western spaces whenever the national state was controlled by enemies of the West.

2nd Postulate: The notion of "human dignity" in the first article of the UN Declaration of Human Rights is a Western-centric notion that privileges the individual over community-based definitions.

Non-Western concepts of human dignity are excluded from the UN Declaration. This is a continuation of the epistemic racism that characterized Western global/colonial designs from the Rights of People to Rights of Man and Human Rights—all defined from within the Western tradition of thought in exclusion, subordination and inferiorization of non-Western epistemologies. The epistemic hierarchy of the world-system with its epistemic racist claim of Western epistemic superiority over the rest is a crucial determinant in the construction of human rights discourse under US hegemony after Second World War.

3rd Postulate: Human Rights rhetoric was always applied against enemies of the Western Imperialist United Front and overlooked when dealing with friendly regimes.

Friendly dictators were always protected from accusations of Human Rights abuses while enemies were accused of violation of Human Rights. This created the paradoxical situation where some regimes with awful human rights records are protected from being denounced as violators of Human Rights while some regimes with better human rights records are denounced. This double standard was there from day one of the December 10, 1948 UN General Assembly approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today with the “war for empire” better known as “war against terrorism,” the colonial continuities and inconsistencies of Human Rights discourse have become more overt and perverse. State terrorism and its coloniality of power are justified by accusing resistant movements of “terrorism.” State atrocities, violation of Human Rights, and even genocidal crimes are now legitimated in the name of fighting terrorism to defend freedom, democracy and liberty. Gaza is the most visible example of the colonial consequences of the “War against Terrorism” used today as the main mechanism of state terrorism around the world to fight liberation movements. Apartheid policies and ethnic cleansing, which were already there since the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, are now overtly justified with the new rhetoric of fighting terrorism.

Gaza represents the end of an era. It is the simultaneous end of three processes:

1-It is the final blow to an imperialist international Human Rights regime under US hegemony.

Although the end of Human Rights was announced before—such as in the excellent book by Costas Douzinas (2000) entitled *The End of Human Rights*—Gaza represents the final blow, the death of the credibility of the Human Rights international regime. This order was already in crisis and de-legitimated with the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq without UN approval and the imperial atrocities we have seen since then including war criminal Ariel Sharon’s massacres and destruction of the West Bank since 2002 in the name of fighting terrorism. For many people around the world, the illusion was that these atrocities are due to the Bush administration and a Republican controlled Congress, but that with a new US administration led by the Democratic Party these policies will be eradicated. However, GAZA is the end of this illusion.

The response of the US Democratic-controlled Congress to GAZA was a blow

in the face of the Human Rights international regime. US Congress came out almost unanimously in support of Israel’s right to self-defense against terrorism and no word was mentioned about Israeli state terrorism such as war crimes, ethnic cleansing or genocidal policies. Peres, Barak, Livni and Olmert, widely accused of having committed war crimes in Gaza (Gray-Block 2009), can do all kind of atrocities, Nazi-like crimes (such as “Sophie’s choice methods” towards Palestinian mothers, massive killings of civilians and even bombing UN buildings with Palestinian refugees inside) and pretend to be justified by the claim that they are fighting terrorism. Moreover, Obama’s declarations in favor of Israel without mention of its atrocities committed in GAZA fostered rapid world disillusionment with the new US administration. The symbolic closure of Guantanamo and the end of an overt policy of torture (I said overt because torture was always and continues to be in the US an undercover operation), as important as they are, are not enough to do what is needed to regain legitimacy. These declarations from top Democratic Party elites in the US, represent a serious blow to the possibility of internationally re-legitimating the global Human Rights regimes after eight years of Bush Administration. As Noam Chomsky says in response to Obama position on Israel:

It’s approximately the Bush position. He began by saying that Israel, like any democracy, has a right to defend itself. That’s true, but there’s a gap in the reasoning. It has a right to defend itself. It doesn’t follow that it has a right to defend itself by force. So we might agree, say, that, you know, the British army in the United States in the colonies in 1776 had a right to defend itself from the terror of George Washington’s armies,

which was quite real, but it didn't follow they had a right to defend themselves by force, because they had no right to be here. So, yes, they had a right to defend themselves, and they had a way to do it—namely, leave.

Same with the Nazis defending themselves against the terror of the partisans. They have no right to do it by force.

In the case of Israel, it's exactly the same. They have a right to defend themselves, and they can easily do it. One, in a narrow sense, they could have done it by accepting the ceasefire that Hamas proposed right before the invasion... a ceasefire that had been in place and that Israel violated and broke. (Chomsky 2009)

In sum, the US justification of Israeli atrocities in GAZA is rapidly closing the doors to the world-wide illusions with the Obama administration and the Democratic-controlled Congress. Few global illusions are left in place for US hegemony and few possibilities to re-legitimize its world leadership is possible after GAZA unless there is 180 degree change in policies and that is very unlikely to happen. This represents the end of an era. As Immanuel Wallerstein (2003) and Giovanni Arrighi (1995) have been arguing now for more than 15 years, we are at the end of US hegemony in the world-system. We are now in a chaotic world order and at the beginning of a new Great Depression with no hegemon able to provide order to the global system.

2-GAZA is the end of Zionism's innocence.

There are right-wing Zionism and left-wing Zionism. The left-wing Zionists always played innocent and naïve blaming right-wing Zionists as the bad guys and responsible of all the atrocities towards Pales-

tinians. If left-wing Zionists lost their innocence in Palestinian eyes long time ago, after GAZA, Zionists of all tendencies and political views lost their innocence in the eyes of the international community. Zionism is now overtly identified and/or discussed as a racist, apartheid, settler colonialist project resorting to ethnic cleansing and Nazi-like atrocities. Zionists today can no longer claim to be, nor can they anymore play, innocent and naive after GAZA.

3-GAZA marks the end of the Westernized imperialist, mythical project of supposedly exporting democracy as part of a rhetoric of human rights.

Similar to African-Americans until 1964, the Palestinians did not have the right to vote. They conquered this right only three years ago. But when they democratically elected a government that the West and Israelis did not like, the response was punishment.

4- GAZA is a radical questioning of the hegemonic narratives of US hegemony and its characterization of the Second World War and the end of its reductionist claims to victimhood.

The simplistic identity politics of the Holocaust hegemonic narrative that essentialized Jewish identity as homogeneous eternal victims and always intentionally innocent ended with GAZA. There is no doubt that Jewish people were colonial subjects and victims of all kinds of atrocities within Christian Europe over a period of several centuries, from their expulsion together with Muslims from Catholic Spain in 1492 to their extermination during the Nazi Holocaust in Second World War. However, this led to an essentialist and simplistic understanding of Nazism and to an essentialized view of Jews.

From Judeophobia to Judeophilia, from eternal evil to eternal victim, Eurocentric racist thinking could not think of Jewish identity outside essentialist binaries. These simplistic and reductionist narratives about the Holocaust and Jewish identity were ex-

plotted by the Zionists for the last 60 years to legitimate their fundamentalist Jewish state built upon the practices and methods of settler colonialism against Palestinians. After Gaza, the legitimization of this rhetoric ended. As Hannah Arendt once said about Eisenman's trial in Jerusalem, Nazi criminals show the banality of evilness. Anyone who practices colonialism and whose imagination is infected by racism, has the potential of ethnic cleansing and becoming a war criminal and this statement includes all human beings including Jewish people.

5- *Gaza raises once again the questions about: "What is Hitlerism?"*

This is a question that was raised by Emmanuel Levinas and Aime Cesaire long time ago and that comes back to hunt us with the recent events in GAZA. If Aime Cesaire is right about his characterization of Nazism as a continuation of colonialism, that is, as the "boomerang effect" of colonial methods coming back to hunt Europeans—as Nazis doing to Europeans what European colonialism was doing to the rest of the non-Western world for 400 years—then, Hitlerism is an integral part of Western subjectivity. There is a Hitler in the psychic and imagination of every Westerner including its most liberal humanist intellectuals, affirms Cesaire in his *Discourse on Colonialism*. If this is the case and if decolonizations of power, being and knowledge were not solved with the end of colonial administrations (as Peruvian intellectual Anibal Quijano's concept of colonality always remind us), and if the dehumanization of the non-Western majorities of the world continued as usual after the Second World War, then we need to rethink the hegemonic narratives about the results of the Second World War.

The hegemonic idea is that Hitler lost the war. This is true in the most ordinary and obvious form of military analysis. But the important question is whether Hitlerism, understood in a Cesairean form as a colonial/racial idea and ideal of the mod-

ern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system, lost the Second World War. This question requires a different answer and is a question that once again is raised by the recent events in GAZA. As stated by Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008), for the Wretched of the Earth, for the "damnes," for the most inferiorized and superexploited non-Western majorities of the world, Hitlerism continues to manifest itself in the post-Second World War—but, I will add, incarnated in the new institutional international regime organized by the postwar hegemonic superpower: the United States of America.

What is the difference between Nazi's massive bombardment of civilian populations and the Nixon/Kissinger indiscriminate bombardment of Laos, Viet-Nam and Cambodia? How do we characterize the US policies of organizing, financing and deliberately encouraging military coups in the Third World that tortured, disappeared and wiped out a whole generation of people in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East? How many million civilians were killed in the CIA military coups of Indonesia, Chile, Guatemala, Congo, and Iran? How to characterize the US support to military dictatorships that practiced Nazi-like methods of torture and murder such as Mobutu, Pinochet, Videla, Duvalier, Sukarno, Marcos, the Shah, Somoza, Batista, Trujillo, etc.? What is the difference between the GAZA ghetto and the Warsaw ghetto? How different is the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from Hitlerism? GAZA is today the equivalent continuity of the Warsaw ghetto.

II. GAZA AND ANTI-SEMITISM

It is simply impossible to talk about anti-semitism these days without a discussion about the history of Christian Europe, Zionism and the formation of the state of Israel in 1948.

For centuries, Jewish people were the

victims of Christian Europe's anti-semitism. Before and after 1492, anti-semitism was linked to Islamophobia. Anti-semitism has had two components from its beginning: "anti-Jewish anti-semitism" and "anti-Arab-Muslim anti-semitism." Spain's Christian Monarchy as one of Christian Europe's frontiers with the Muslim world, fought a battle to conquer the Islamic side of Spain better known as Al-Andalus (Kennedy 1997). In early 1492, when the Spanish Christian Monarchy finally defeated the forces of Al-Andalus, they expelled Jews and Arabs from the Iberian Peninsula not without its pogroms and massacres (Baer 1993; Gerber 1992, Bresc 2001). Anti-semitism in those years *included* Arab Muslims. Semitic people were characterized as coming from what we call today the Middle East and that included Arabs and Jews.

After the Christian Monarchy's conquest of Islamic Spain, Andalusian Jews were exiled in North Africa and the Ottoman empire as refugees from the Catholic Monarchy's atrocities in Al-Andalus. It is important to say that Andalusian Jews found a home in these *Muslim territories*. Similar to Al-Andalus in the Southeast part of what we call Spain today (Melocal 2003; Lowney 2005), most of the existing Muslim regimes at the time recognized Jewish minority rights and treated them with dignity as opposed to Christian Europe (Ernst 2003; Kramer 2006). Without assuming a romantic view of the past, at least until the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, Arabs and Jews lived in peace together for centuries in Arab lands and Al-Andalus is praised as a moment in history of peaceful co-existence between Jews and Muslims. Although conflicts were not absent from this history, it was not a history of anti-semitic extermination or pogroms (Stillman 1979). Anti-semitic pogroms, extermination, torture and massacres against Jews were fundamentally a Christian European problem. As Carl W. Ernst states:

Jews and Muslims typically had much more positive relations with each other in pre-modern times than either group had with Christians; it is really only since the establishment of the state of Israel that Jews and Muslims have become antagonistic. (Ernst 2003: 13)

Christian Europe's Final Solutions The Spanish Christian Monarchy began the European colonial expansion in 1492, the same year they expelled Arabs and Jews from Al-Andalus (Dussel 1994). The colonization of indigenous peoples in the Americas and the enslavement of Africans in the New World's colonial plantation economy inaugurated what is known as the Modern World. It was on the shoulders of a colonial/racist configuration of anti-black and anti-indigenous racism that a new international racial division of labor was formed and that modernity was founded (Quijano 2000). Indigenous and African peoples were placed below the line that defines the Human (Maldonado-Torres 2005, 2006, 2008). They were treated and characterized as sub-humans or simply non-humans (Quijano 1991, 2000; Dussel 1994; Gordon 2008). With the emergence of the new racial economy, anti-semitism and Islamophobia as a particular form of discrimination against semitic people in Europe acquired new connotations. If before 1492 "anti-Jewish anti-semitism" and "anti-Arab/Muslim anti-semitism" were defined on the basis of religious discrimination ("praying to the wrong GOD") or on theological interpretations of Christ, with the anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism in the Americas these old forms of discrimination acquired new meanings (Maldonado-Torres 2005, 2006, 2008). Anti-Black racism became part of the foundation of modernity and affected the situation of all non-European subjects at the time (Gordon 1995). With the colonial "boomerang effect" (Cesaire 2001), colonial racism in the Americas came back to Europe

and redefined old forms of discriminations against Arabs, Gypsies and Jews turning them, like Blacks and Indigenous peoples, into sub-human or simply non-human (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006). For centuries Jews in Europe lived the nightmares of anti-semitism. They were repressed, tortured, killed and persecuted.

The Holocaust represents one of the most extreme forms of European FINAL SOLUTIONS, but was not by far the only one existing at the time. Another anti-semitic "FINAL SOLUTION" contemplated early on by the Nazis, but developed by the British Empire, was to transfer European Jews out of Europe (Segev 2001). Given the British Empire's colonial control of the sacred land of Jews, Christian and Muslims in Palestine, they began after the 1917 Balfour Declaration and with the support of the European Zionist movement to massively export huge numbers of European Jews to what is defined by these monotheistic religions as the Holy Land (Segev 2001; Gerber 2006; Pappé 2006). This began a process of settler colonialism where Zionism as a form of Jewish nationalism in Europe turned into colonialism (Piterberg 2008).

European Jews reproduced in Palestine with the blessings of the British Empire the classical forms of European settler colonialism. Palestinian Jews who enjoyed plenty of rights when the Ottoman Empire controlled Palestine (Greber 2006), were absolutely opposed to the British Empire's occupation of Palestine and to European Jews' Zionist aims of forming a Jewish-only nation-state in Palestine (Hart 2007a). The Zionist project of forming a Jewish state was basically a European-Jews project that brought European colonial methods of settler colonialism to Palestine. The formation of the state of Israel was done on the shoulders of racism and massacres against Palestinians (Christian and Muslim) to displace them from their land (Masalha 2005; Hart 2007a; Piterberg 2008).

"Ethnic cleansing" is the term used by a new generation of Israeli historians to describe Israeli policies towards Palestinians (Pappé 2007). Paraphrasing Aime Cesaire's (2001) *Discourse on Colonialism*, Hitlerism as a continuation of colonial racist ideology came back to hunt Palestinians this time at the hands of European Jews who ironically were escaping from the Nazi Holocaust. Israel was founded as a settler colonialist project with an "anti-Semitic anti-Semitism" discourse. European Jews established a racist/colonial discrimination against Palestinians. Similar to the North American settler colonialism against Native-Americans, Israeli elites, the new identity of European Jews, violated every treaty and kept over the last 60 years a systematic forced displacement of Palestinians from their land to conquer and settle Jewish colonies in these territories (Masalha 1992; Hart 2007b; Pappé 2007).

The incorporation of European Jews as "Whites" in most of the Western metropolitan centers after the Second World War (Brodkin 2000) and the use of Israel as a Western pro-imperialist military bastion in the Middle East (Chomsky 1999), incorporated the Israeli colonial project directly at the center of US hegemony and global White supremacy. A triple global alliance was built between White European and White Euro-American elites with Euro-American and European Jewish pro-Zionist elites in the West and European and Euro-American Jewish settlers in Palestine. Western blessings to Israel, legitimated, financed and gave green light to Israeli settler colonialism and its atrocities in Palestine. GAZA today is the tragic consequence of this colonial history.

GAZA AND GLOBAL ANTI-SEMITISM

It is also impossible to discuss anti-semitism today without taking into account

the transformation of European Jews from racialized subjects into “Whites” in both Western Europe and North America and without taking into account the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish-only settler colonialist state. With the incorporation of European-Jews as White there is an important reduction of “anti-Jewish anti-semitism” in the West and the world at large. In contrast, other forms of racism such as “anti-Arab/Muslim anti-semitism” is part of ordinary common sense in the West. The recent incorporation of European-Jews and Euro-American-Jews into whiteness has important consequences (Ernst 2003: 11-12).

Can we imagine what would be the reaction in the West today if any Arab state would do to Jewish people what Israel is doing to Palestinians today? What would be the reaction if an Arab state would massacre Jews, the way Israel massacres Palestinians in Gaza today? What would be the reaction of Israel, the European Community and the United States if any European country names a Minister similar to Israel’s Lieberman who calls for the expulsion of Palestinians from Israel and calls for the expulsion of all Jews from their country? By the way, it is important to say that Palestinian-Jews under the Ottoman Muslim empire had more political, democratic and civil rights (see Gerber 2006) than what Palestinian Muslims and Christians had during the British colonial occupation of Palestine and under the 60 years of the Israeli state settler colonialism. Moreover, a Jewish only state is closer to an apartheid republic than to a real democratic republic.

However, neo-conservative elites in the USA and Western Europe (Taguieff 2002; Iganski 2003) define “Judeophobia” and “anti-Jewish anti-Semitism” as the hegemonic forms of racism in the West today in order to blame, in a perverse way, Arabs and Muslims and to hide the hegemonic forms of White racism which are now mostly “anti-Black racism” and “anti-Arab/Muslim anti-Semitism.” Given Ar-

abs/Muslims’ critical views of Israel and the Israeli state’s association of critiques of the Zionist state with anti-Semitism, White racist elites in Europe and North America developed a strategy of “bad faith” (Gordon 1995) where the main victims of racism now are accused of being the major perpetrators of racism. This is perverse, to say the least, in a context where White racism is manifested primarily as “anti-Black racism” and “anti-Arab/Muslim anti-Semitism.” The same perverse logic happens today in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where Israeli colonizers accuse Palestinians of anti-Semitism while Zionist “anti-Arab/Muslim anti-Semitism” is silenced.

Some pro-Zionist Euro-American-Jewish and European-Jewish elites enjoying the privilege of “Whiteness” in the racial/ethnic hierarchies of the West use their power position to mobilize uncritical support from the West towards Israel and to achieve impunity for its crimes. Jews from all over the world can come to Palestine and get access to land while Palestinian refugees cannot return and those living in Palestine are second-class citizens or simply pariahs in their own land. The critique of “anti-Jewish anti-semitism” and the Holocaust was always manipulated, abused and instrumentalized by the Israeli settler colonialist state from its foundation in 1948 until today to justify its colonial domination, expansion and terror (Finkelstein 2008). The Israeli state is the main agency responsible for banalizing the critique of anti-semitism while they accuse all critiques of the Zionist state as equivalent to anti-semitism (Balibar, Brauman, Butler, and Hazan 2003; Finkelstien 2008). This instrumentalist argument trivialized real situations of anti-Semitism and reduced the credibility of anti-racist discourse against anti-Semitism world-wide (Ibid.).

Since when criticism of state policies has become equivalent to being racist against its population? Since when criticizing American state militarism and imperi-

alism is equivalent to being anti-American, or criticizing the Mexican state is regarded as being anti-Mexican? This discursive equivalence between state identity and its population is typical of every nationalism. What is particular of Zionist nationalist rhetoric is the attempt to associate critiques of Israel not only to an anti-national, anti-Israeli sentiment (which is what every nationalism does) but also to racist rhetoric via the establishment of a discursive equivalence of critiques of the Israeli state with anti-semitism. Israel banalized anti-semitism by developing a systematic accusation of anti-semitism to any critique of the Israeli state. This has created a complex and perverse situation where “anti-Jewish anti-semitism” is banalized by some and exaggerated by others, while “anti-Arab anti-semitism” is permitted, acceptable and encouraged in the West in the name of opposing violent, terrorist anti-semitism.

If we understand anti-Arab racism as a form of anti-semitism, the main ideologues today of this “anti-semite anti-semitism” are pro-Zionist intellectuals, both Israeli and non-Israeli (Masalha 2007; Spector 2008; Finkelstein 2008). This has created a situation where real expressions of “anti-Jewish anti-semitism” are banalized by many people and where old forms of “anti-Jewish anti-semitism” are recycled to describe Israeli atrocities. For example, slogans such as “Hamas, Hamas: Jewish to the gas” in anti-Zionist demonstrations in Europe today should be of concern to anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-racist movements. It is true that this is a minority within the anti-Zionist movement. However, we cannot underestimate the return of “anti-Jewish anti-semitic” racism. Old anti-semitism is coming back with a force in reaction to Israel’s ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. “Anti-Jewish anti-semitism” is wrong no matter from where it is coming from and what the causes for its return are. A minority of White Christian Europeans are once again repeating old anti-semitic

racism and oppressed groups such as Arabs, even if in small numbers within their own communities, are also reproducing old stereotypes about Jewish people.

However, there is a fundamental difference between Jewish people and the Zionist state. On the one hand, Zionist pretension to represent all Jewish people is false and constitutes a political manipulation. But that does not justify the use of racist rhetoric even if the groups are oppressed groups. On the other hand, Zionist justification of Nazi-like ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity by Israel in Palestine and most recently in Gaza using “anti-Arab anti-semitism” and accusing the critics of Israel to be “anti-semites” has created a global outrage and in some minority cases “anti-Jewish anti-Semitic” reactions. Moreover, US Congressional resolutions backing Israel’s right to self-defense while the Israeli butchery of Palestinians was on-going contribute to Israel’s impunity to reproduce the overt racism against Palestinians as people whose right to exist is questioned by racially placing them in what Fanon defined as “living in hell” or the “zone of non-being” (Gordon 2006).

Israeli atrocities are justified under the claim of fighting Islamic fundamentalism today. The recent massacres in GAZA where justified in the name of fighting Hamas. With Saddam Hussein killed and Iraq under the US occupation, the new enemy of Zionism today is Iran. Hizbullah (or Hezbollah) and Hamas are seen simply as unilateral creations of Iran. The role played by Iran in the rise and/or continuity of these organizations is certainly not any more significant than the role played by the West in the creation and continuing support of Israel as a settler-colonial state. Iran supports but did not create Hizbullah nor Hamas. They both arose as a result of Israeli colonialism in the region.

Now, the question is: What is fundamentalism?

III. FUNDAMENTALISM AND EUROCENTRISM

A foundational basis of contemporary discussions on political Islam and on the so-called “War on Terrorism” is what Walter Mignolo (2000) conceptualized as “epistemic racism.” Epistemic racism is the inferiorization of non-Western epistemologies and cosmologies to privilege Western epistemology as the superior form of knowledge and as the only source to define human rights, democracy, citizenship, etc. This is grounded in the idea that reason and philosophy lie in the West while non-reason lies in the “rest.” As Lewis Gordon said:

The notion that philosophy was a peculiarly European affair logically led to the conclusion that there was (and continuous to be) something about European cultures that makes them more conducive to philosophical reflection than others.... The notion of Europeans’ intrinsic connection to philosophy is, in other words, circular: it defines them as philosophical in the effort to determine whether they were philosophical.... To conclude that the kinds of intellectual activity that were called philosophical in the past and have joined the fold in the present were thus limited to one group of people, most of whom were artificially lumped together to create false notions of unity and singular identity, requires a model of humanity that does not fit the facts (Gordon 2008, 6)

Epistemic racism is a foundational and constitutive logic of the modern/colonial world. European humanists and scholars in the 19th century such as Ernst Renan “... argued that Islam was incompatible with sci-

ence and philosophy. He based his reasoning on the claim that Islam was an essentially Arab religion and that Arabs belong to the Semitic race, which has an ‘atomistic’ mentality that is incapable of philosophical synthesis... Renan remained firmly convinced that Semites (meaning Arabs and Jews) did not have this capacity...” (Ernst 2003: 20-21).

This epistemic racism is manifested in discussions about human rights today. Non-Western epistemologies that define human rights and human dignity in forms different from the West, are simply excluded from the conversation. This is linked to the contemporary discussions about “fundamentalism.” According to the “born again Neo-con,” Christopher Hitchens:

...the very definition of a ‘fundamentalist’ is someone who believes that ‘holy writ’ is... the fixed and unalterable word of God. (Hitchens 2009: 74)

This specific definition, which is the hegemonic definition used in the West today, hides what is fundamental of all fundamentalisms, that is, the belief in the superiority of their own epistemology and the inferiority of the rest. The first premise of Hitchens’s definition is that a fundamentalist has to be necessarily religious. In this definition, so-called secular views are excluded a priori from being fundamentalist. The problematic secular/religious Western binary is reproduced here. Accordingly, a secular perspective cannot be fundamentalist under the logic of this definition. Second, is the premise that the only possible fundamentalism is about any doctrine that does a “literal,” “dogmatic” interpretation of a “sacred text.” The premise is that a “sacred text” can only be a religious text. To treat a secular text as “sacred” is not considered as part of the definition of fundamentalism. Secular forms of fundamentalism such as Stalinism as a Marxist fundamentalism or

Positivism as form of scientific fundamentalism, are excluded from the hegemonic definition.

In sum, this definition hides the most important form of fundamentalism in the world today: Eurocentric fundamentalism. It is so powerful that it is used as the “norm” and the hegemonic “common sense” to define what is democracy, what is “terrorism,” what is “economy,” what are human rights, what is the environment, and who is a fundamentalist. Eurocentric fundamentalism is the “sacralization” of the Western tradition of thought and the inferiorization of non-Western epistemologies and cosmologies. It is founded on epistemic racism. Its universalism is actually that of a particular defining the universal for the rest—that is, a global/imperial design. If we break with the secular/religious binary split, what is shared by all fundamentalisms in the modern/colonial world is “epistemic racism.”

A major consequence of the European colonial expansion and its epistemic racism is what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called epistemicide against non-Western epistemologies. The invisibility and even extermination of other epistemologies are at the root of Eurocentric fundamentalism. Moreover, the hegemonic role of Eurocentric fundamentalism is manifested in that many of what are called today Third World fundamentalisms such as Islamic fundamentalism, Afro-centric fundamentalism and indigenous fundamentalism, are inverted forms of Eurocentric fundamentalism. They are inversions of the Eurocentric fundamentalist binaries. If the West defines itself as inherently and naturally democratic, in favor of women’s rights, human rights, democracy, freedom, etc., the non-West is defined as inherently and naturally authoritarian, patriarchal, etc. This Eurocentric binary which is at the foundation of epistemic racism is not displaced but inverted by what are called third world fundamentalisms.

So, what I want to emphasize here is that third world fundamentalisms such as Islamic fundamentalism or Afro-centric fundamentalism are derivative forms of Eurocentric fundamentalism. They just invert the Eurocentric binary and affirm the opposite side of the binary and leave intact the hegemonic binary itself. For example, they will affirm patriarchy or authoritarian forms of political authority leaving in the hands of eurocentrism the image of being democratic and feminist. Hitchens’s definition of what fundamentalism is hides the underlying assumption of all fundamentalisms: the ethno-centric idea that only their own epistemology is superior and the rest are inferior.

It is from diasporic and border thinkers that challenges to Eurocentric fundamentalism and its derivative forms of eurocentric Third World fundamentalism are emerging. Islamic Feminist, Afro-Caribbean philosophers, the Marxist-Tojolabism of the Zapatistas, the “ayllu” of Aymara thinkers, etc., are examples of traditions of thought that have developed institutional forms and concepts of non-Western democracy, ecology, feminism and human rights beyond the Eurocentric fundamentalist binaries.

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