

What Is Islamo-Leftism? Its Origins and Current Developments

Pierre-André Taguieff

In France for several years now, the universities, including the top ranking ones [*grandes écoles*], have been subjected to increasing pressure by active minorities, who can be characterized as “woke” or Islamo-leftist and who are able to exert, here and there, a genuine ideological dictatorship. On a number of questions, starting with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict or the Islamist menace, freedom of expression and freedom of debate are de facto forbidden. A pluralism of opinion has been replaced by the imposition of the ideological convictions of a politicized minority who share the same hatred of Israel and same admiration for “armed resistance” as an Islamist organization like Hamas. This is the case of Sciences Po Paris, which under the cover of virtuous calls for diversity and inclusion has fallen into a culture of suspicion, intolerance, denunciation, and sidelining of “those who don’t toe the line.” As at other institutions of higher learning, small sectarian far-left groups, in the name of the defense of “minorities” and of “victims”—those whom they value—impose their law, in the face of administrative authorities whose main concern is not to “make waves” and who, as a consequence, are willing to accept everything, to tolerate everything, closing their eyes as much as possible to the actions of the activists,

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who show off and impose the reign of their intellectual terrorism. This is the spectacle produced by the policy of tolerance toward the intolerant.

In order to measure the degree to which wokeism has taken over Sciences Po Paris, it is best to take a look at the jargon-filled, involuntarily comical announcement presented on March 4, 2024, by the “Head of Engagement,” establishing March 2024 as “the month of Diversity and Inclusion at Sciences Po.” One finds in it a stark illustration of the politico-cultural Americanization in the woke style of this famous Parisian establishment, proving that the ridiculous no longer kills, even in France:

In March, several important international days are celebrated and have as their common goal fighting discrimination and advocating for a more inclusive and egalitarian society. For the very first time, Sciences Po’s Head of Engagement has decided to organize Diversity and Inclusion Month. On this occasion, Sciences Po has mobilized to offer conferences, workshops, meetings, exhibitions, screenings, plays.... This month aims to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, to facilitate the understanding of the mechanisms and issues related to different forms of discrimination, and finally to mobilize and encourage action. A rich program that reflects the diversity of our institution, its commitments, and its values....

EVENTS RESERVED FOR EMPLOYEES

- March 5: Queer Coffee & Friends, a meet-up every first Tuesday of the month from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. to discuss LGBTQIA+ topics in a safe way. The first meeting will take place at the Maison des Sciences Po (campus 1 Saint-Thomas)
- March 19: Anti-discrimination awareness workshop for managers....

In student circles as well as in faculty circles, the silent majority lets things go, it lets the sectarians and the fanatics, without forgetting the idiots, impose their certainties and shout their slogans. Manichaeism reigns, barring the road for necessary debates, replaced by the competition between victims. The de-ideologization of the majority compounds the resignation and conformist cowardice of the now woke administrative authorities, leaving the field open for the tyrannical minorities. What I have called Islamo-Palestinianism seems now to have become the dominant ideology of a number of university establishments, where one famously teaches the nebulous “gender theory” from the perspective of intersectional neo-feminism or decolonialism, and where one denounces “liberticidal”

and “Islamophobic” *laïcité* (state secularism) and “republican fundamentalism,” all while idealizing the multicultural society being erected as the path to salvation.

On March 12, 2024, at Sciences Po Paris, the occupation of the Émile-Boutmy amphitheater, rebaptized “Gaza” by pro-Hamas activists, demonstrated this worrying sectarian drift. “Don’t let her in, she is a Zionist”: this is how a student, a member of the UEJF (Union des étudiants juifs de France/Union of Jewish Students of France), was forbidden access to the room in which students were supposed to debate. This Jewish student specified that the pro-Palestinian activists told her, after having identified her, “You there, you’re not getting in! ... We know who you are.” This is an example of discrimination against a person because of her diverging opinion. Any departure from the anti-Israeli consensus and more broadly anti-Zionism is considered to be intolerable. The denunciation of the “genocide of Palestinians” constitutes the main theme of accusation in anti-Zionist discourse since October 7, 2023. It aims to make everyone forget the massacres and the rapes committed by the Islamo-terrorists of Hamas.

Since March 12, the candidate for the movement La France Insoumise/France Unbowed (LFI) for the European Parliament, Rima Hassan, the Franco-Palestinian face of Islamo-leftist movements, posted on X her “support for all of the students and for all of the faculty who are mobilizing against the genocide taking place” (adding: “at your service—your rebellion is sound and beautiful”), followed the next day by LFI MP Aymeric Caron, who sent out, also on X, a “bravo to the Sciences Po students who are mobilizing against the genocide underway in Gaza.” Known for its slogan-like appeals “against ethnic cleansing and the Israeli genocidal project,” the radical left-wing collective “Urgence Palestine/Emergency Palestine,” which called for a demonstration in support of pro-Palestinian students in front of the Sciences Po premises on March 14, posted this message on X: “Denouncing genocide is not a crime.” The victim inversion is illustrated here perfectly: victims of a jihadist mega-pogrom on October 7, the Israelis are accused of “genocide,” presented as a “project” being carried out in Gaza.

Islamo-Leftism, Pseudo Anti-Racism, and Anti-Zionism

What is Islamo-leftism? It is a grouping of strategic alliances and ideological convergences between far-left groups and diverse Islamist movements. What is an Islamo-leftist? It is either a far-left activist who allies himself with Islamist groups in the name of certain supposedly revolutionary causes (anti-capitalism, anti-imperi-

alism, anti-Zionism, etc.) or an Islamist who draws close to the far left for tactical/strategic reasons by adopting some of its mobilizing themes.

In both cases, anti-racism is invoked. Every Islamo-leftist claims to be fighting racism. But the “racism” that he is combatting is first and foremost “systemic racism,” which is supposed to structure Western societies, said to be still “white.” It follows that the anti-racism of the Islamo-leftists can be reduced to the project of destroying Western societies accused of being intrinsically racist. The designated enemy is therefore the West and Westernized societies. The “struggle against racism” is transformed into the struggle against “systemic racism” or against all forms of so-called “systemic” discrimination (of race, of gender, of religion, etc.).

Like decolonial ideologues, contemporary Islamo-leftists have taken up this anti-racist vision of the world, in which “systemic racism” is supposed to manifest itself in a societal racism and an “institutional racism” characterizing Western societies. But they don’t stop there. Their fundamental thesis is that “institutional racism” is first and foremost “institutional Islamophobia.” Therefore, the fight against racism tends to be reduced to the fight against Islamophobia. That is where there is an alignment with Islamist propaganda.

They add to this what I call the thesis of substitution, which claims that in Western societies, antisemitism has now been replaced with Islamophobia. The fight against Islamophobia must therefore replace the fight against antisemitism. They can therefore denounce the fight against antisemitism as a strategy of occultation and diversion that allows for attention to be deflected from the real threat, Islamophobia, and the real racism that they see as “Zionism,” a fantasized and demonized Zionism. This is how Islamo-leftism places itself in the field of anti-Zionist propaganda.

Historical Variants

Islamism, which designates a revolutionary tradition on the left, constitutes a general category comprising a number of historical variants: Islamo-communism, Islamo-Third-Worldism, Islamo-alter-globalization, Islamo-decolonialism, Islamo-wokeism. Islamism has a prehistory, which starts in 1920 with the Islamo-Bolshevik collusion, and a history, which starts in 1978–1979 with the Islamo-communist alliance in Iran.

In the prehistory of Islamism, one has to go back to the first “Congress of the People of the East,” organized on September 1, 1920, in Baku by the Communist International, which had just been created. It is there that Lenin defined

Islam as the religion of “oppressed nations,” that is to say, as an oppressed religion. It was therefore necessary not to offend the religious sentiments of the poor Muslim peasants. Comrade Zinoviev declared that it was necessary “to call for a genuine holy war [*jihad*] against the English and French capitalists.” This was one of the first appearances of the Islamo-communist convergence in the name of anti-imperialism. But the romance rapidly soured. In 1923, Stalin had the Tatar leader Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, a partisan of a national Muslim communism, arrested.

It was also under the banner of anti-imperialism that the Bandung Conference (April 18–24, 1955) was held, the first Afro-Asian conference, which can be considered the founding event of Third-Worldism and which would develop on the basis of the rejection of colonialism, imperialism, and racism, and would provide an ideological basis for the radical anti-Zionism and anti-Western sentiment that will be found later in decolonialism.

Next one must emphasize the importance of the Khomeinist revolution, when in 1978–1979 the Iranian Communist Party (Tudeh), like all of the groups of the left-wing opposition to the Shah, supported the Shiite Islamists in their conquest of power, to the applause of some of the Western intellectual elites (among them Michel Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir), who saw in these developments a new model of revolution, supposedly endowed with a “spiritual” dimension. The Iranian communists, like other left-wing groups, believed they could play the card of an alliance with the Iranian Islamists. But after four years of collaboration with the Islamist government, Tudeh was brutally destroyed on Khomeini’s orders.

Finally, it is necessary to point out the connections between Islamists and Marxist revolutionaries in the 1990s in favor of the alter-globalization movement, in which Trotskyist organizations such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Great Britain took part. In the fall of 1994, Chris Harman, who was one of the leaders of this revolutionary party, published a long article entitled “The Prophet and the Proletariat.” In this text, Harman theorizes a strategic, but conditional, conjunctural alliance between revolutionary socialists and Islamists, particularly on the fronts of anti-imperialism and anti-racism.

Sometimes communists also convert to Islam: this was the case with the Marxist-Leninist terrorist Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, known as Carlos. The itinerary of comrade Carlos is emblematic: this communist activist of Venezuelan origin, Third-Worldist, and international terrorist converted to militant Islam after having embraced the Palestinian cause. He then found a place for himself in the jihadist terrorism of al-Qaeda, declaring on November 1, 2001, that he experienced

“a profound relief when seeing the heroic acts of sacrifice of September 11, 2001,” and thus paying homage to the charismatic leader of the jihadist group: “Sheikh Osama bin Laden is the model of the mujahid. He is a living martyr, a pure one.” Anti-imperialism constitutes his primary motivation, which justifies what he himself calls ideological “convergence”: “All those who fight against the enemies of humanity, that is to say, American imperialism, the Zionists, their allies, and their agents, are my comrades.”

Radical Anti-Zionism at the Heart of Islamo-Leftism

In the discourse of Islamo-leftist propaganda, one can find a strategic balance between the compassionate presentation of the Muslim victim (colonialism, racism, etc.) and the heroic celebration of the Muslim rebel, the mujahid, the fighter for the faith. On the one hand, the victim figure of the colonized, discriminated against, and “racialized,” and, on the other hand, that of the vigilante-warrior, the jihadist, transformed into “resister.” The Islamo-terrorists of Hamas can thus be celebrated as “resisters.”

There one can also find anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist themes, but the primary enemy is the capitalist, colonialist, and “racist” West, racism being an attribute of “whites” alone (“Zionists” included) and “systemic racism” a unique characteristic of “white societies.” This is the fundamental dogma of decolonial and identity politics ideologues, who claim “political anti-racism,” a one-sided racism that masks an undeclared anti-white racism, and a radical anti-Zionism, aiming at the destruction of Israel, accused of being a “racist” or “apartheid” state. Most of the countries of the “Global South” have rallied around the Palestinian cause, and since the Israeli military response to the massacres of October 7, they accuse Israel not only of “ethnic cleansing” but also and primarily of “genocide” against the Palestinians.

I coined the phrase “Islamo-leftism” in the early 2000s to designate a militant alliance in place between Islamist groups and groups on the far left (which I designated as leftist to simplify) in the name of the Palestinian cause, erected as the new great revolutionary cause. It is therefore a descriptive term, referring to an observable ideological-political phenomenon, namely, in the form of “anti-Zionist” protests bringing together representatives of Islamist groups (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah) and far-left militants, primarily Trotskyists but also “alter-globalists.”

As I observed and analyzed in 2000–2002, this strategic alliance against a common enemy, Israel or “Zionism,” was based on the image of the Palestinian as victim, which in far-left groups then started to be transferred onto the Muslim, basing

itself on the axiom that Islam was the religion of the poor, the oppressed, and the victims of colonialism and imperialism as well as racism. Therefore, the great sin is Islamophobia. To be pro-Palestinian, from the leftist perspective, is to be at once anti-Zionist, anti-imperialist, and Islamophile.

With this combination there is a very important break with tradition. Despite the fact that in the political culture of the far left, religion was “the opium of the people” that had to be denounced, the new Islamo-leftist alliance breaks with this militant atheism, but only to the benefit of political Islam, perceived as a revolutionary force, that is, as the only new revolutionary force. The first moment of the Islamo-leftist alliance is contemporary to the Second Intifada and the rise of the alter-globalization movement: the anti-Zionists and the alter-globalization activists saw in Islamist groups possible, even necessary, allies.

An Islamo-alter-globalist configuration was created in the 1990s and early 2000s. Since the late 1990s, the honorable Muslim Brother Tariq Ramadan, who would be invited to all the European Social Forums, understood that he could exploit the anti-capitalism supposedly shared by Islamists and Marxist-inspired alter-globalists, against a background of anti-Westernism (or “hesperophobia”), centered on a radical anti-Americanism.

The international context was first marked by the catastrophic World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, held in Durban from September 2 to 9, 2001, which was a festival of anti-Jewish hatred centered on the demonization of “Zionism” by certain pro-Palestinian NGOs, then by the attacks of 9/11 committed by a jihadist organization, al-Qaeda, whose declared objective was to combat the “Jewish–Crusader alliance” or the “Zionist–Crusader” alliance. The famous founding declaration, published on February 23, 1998, of the “Global Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders” marked the beginning of a new phase for radical Islamism, characterized notably by the designation of the Jews as incarnating the absolute enemy.

The enemy was the same for the Islamists and for the New Leftists, but it did not have the same name: the former designated it as “the Jews,” the latter as the “Zionists.” All of them declared themselves to be anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist. This hybrid movement then found its *raison d’être* in the ideological convergence and strategic alliances around what I have called “radical” or “absolute” anti-Zionism, whose objective is the destruction of Israel. During these protests, the “Allahu Akbar” that sounded did not bother the leftist militants present in the least, no more so than the consensual calls for the destruction of Israel to the tone of “Zionists = Nazis” or “Zionism = racism.” The cry “death to the Jews” came to

enhance these Islamo-leftist spectacles that were the pro-Palestinian demonstrations, starting in October 2000.

The anti-Jewish dimension of these demonstrations was striking, as was the importance given to the Nazification of the “Zionists” and more widely of the Jews, intended to convey this message summarizing the ongoing inversion of victimhood: the Zionist Jews are the new Nazis, while the Palestinians are the new Jews. The instrumentalization and misappropriation of anti-racism consisted then in giving it the face of anti-Zionism, based on the image of the Palestinian victim of a fantasized “Zionism.” These themes of Palestinian propaganda were internalized by the entire far left and part of the left at large.

Transformation of Islamo-Leftism

In the history of Islamo-leftism, I distinguish three periods: the first marked by the confluence of alter-globalization, anti-Zionism, and Islamism (2000–2005); the second marked by a growing decolonial hold on far-left movements, for the most part converted to the Islamophile victimhood cult and calling for “political anti-racism”; the third by the integration of radical anti-Zionism in the political religion that is woke ideology, and which has become a globalized intellectual fashion. During the years from 2005 to 2015, the figure of the victim will progressively be occupied by the Muslim, on the basis of a slogan: Islam is supposedly a “dominated” religion, it is supposedly the religion of an oppressed minority, the religion of the “dominated,” the excluded, the “racialized.” And the populations coming out of Muslim immigration are supposedly the heirs of colonized peoples, therefore “oppressed,” “discriminated against,” “racialized.” A pro-Palestinian victimization is thus enlarged into a pro-Islamic victimization. It is here that there is the second moment of Islamo-leftism, centered on the image of the Muslim victim of racism, which will be illustrated by calls to “fight Islamophobia,” which will multiply beginning in the mid-2000s.

The denunciation of “systemic racism” and “institutional racism,” both perfectly *imaginary*, have been borrowed from decolonial discourse and translated into a denunciation of “institutional Islamophobia,” something no less imaginary. Since then, in published platforms as well as during protests “against Islamophobia,” far-left activists have mobilized with Islamist activists, whether Muslim Brotherhood or Salafi. Islamo-leftism has taken the shape of an Islamo-decolonialism. The Islamo-leftism of the years from 1990 to 2005 was first and foremost anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, in the Third-Worldist tradition; Islamo-decolonialism is

first and foremost *anti-Western* and *anti-white*, and its supposed “anti-racism” is reduced to *anti-white racism*.

The meaning of the term “Islamist-leftist” has been transformed with the evolution of the far left, which, after having turned away from the proletariat and the plebs, has progressively shifted to decolonialism, intersectionality, a radical misandric feminism (that is to say, the “second sexism” that, nourished by so-called “gender theory,” incites hatred toward the “white hetero male”), and, to top it all off, “critical race theory,” which I have analyzed as being a form of pseudo anti-racist militant *racialization*, or more precisely, of neo-anti-racism masking an anti-white racism. This turn of “anti-racism” into a new form of racism against Westerners of European origin is at the same time the most significant, true “sign of the times,” and the most worrying.

In France, it is the Parti des Indigènes de la République/Party of the Indigenous of the Republic (PIR) that is the clearest expression of this racializing pseudo anti-racism. But one also finds echoes in the heart of the NPA (New Anticapitalist Party) and, later, in the leadership of the La France insoumise/France Unbowed (LFI), namely, with Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Éric Coquerel, Clémentine Autain, and Danièle Obono (close to de Houria Bouteldja, who was the longtime muse of the Indigènes de la République). One ought therefore to speak today of an Islamo-decolonialism and an Islamo-radicalization.

The March against Islamophobia on November 10, 2019, in Paris, took place according to this model precisely, bringing together on the side of “progressive” activism the CGT (General Confederation of Labor), the UNEF (National Union of Students of France), the PCF (French Communist Party), the UCL (Libertarian Communist Union), the EELV (The Ecologists), Lutte Ouvrière (Workers’ Struggle), Jean-Luc Mélenchon (and other leaders of LFI), Benoît Hamon and the NPA (New Anticapitalist Party), and Islamist associations (with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood) as well as indigenists.

It is within this new ideological configuration that today, in France as well as Great Britain, based on the model of the United States and Canada, “*woke*” activism (implying being permanently “awake” in the face of “offensive words”) and “*cancel culture*” (the culture of cancellation or banishment aimed at personalities or works judged politically incorrect) are developing. These activists who define themselves as “progressive” trivialize a hyper-moralism and a pseudo anti-racist puritanism that works toward the destruction of our history and our high culture, as well as the disappearance of our academic freedoms and the freedom of expression in certain universities, and more broadly in the intellectual field.

With a few exceptions, far-leftist movements, but also a part of the left in general, have moved, in relation to political Islam, from indulgence to complacency; and from the latter to connivance, even complicity, through diverse alliances. After the launching of the Second Intifada (at the end of September 2000) and 9/11, the rupture between the anti-Islamist republican left and the radical anti-Zionist (and anti-system) left manifested itself in a number of ways in the political field. During the 2010s, things turned toward confrontation after jihadi attacks on French soil, illustrated by the deadly attacks of the anti-Jewish jihadist Mohammed Merah in March 2012 in Toulouse and in Montauban, as well as the terrorist attack perpetrated in January 2015 in Paris against the editor of the weekly *Charlie Hebdo* by two jihadi brothers, Chérif and Saïd Kouachi.

Useful Idiots of the Islamists

The witch hunt launched against the supposed “Islamophobes” at Sciences Po Grenoble, between November 2020 and March 2021, reminded us that Islamo-leftism is doing damage, particularly in higher education. It testifies to the fact that some students and professors, active on the left, have rallied around the rhetorical strategy of Islamists, successfully instrumentalizing the Palestinian cause as a mobilizing victimhood cause. The Palestinian cause has been transformed into an Islamo-Palestinianist cause, the new supreme cause, whereas Israel and the “Zionists” incarnate diabolical causality. This is the primary effect of the great Islamo-leftist indoctrination on social media. The Islamist strategies have thus succeeded, thanks to their far-left allies, in banalizing the “hunt against Zionists” in France as in other Western nations. However, as we have seen since the mega-pogrom of October 7, 2023, the “witch hunt against Zionists” has often taken the form of a “hunt against Jews,” in street protests as well in university spaces.

The more Islamism kills, the more Islamophobia is denounced. This is the apparent paradox that gives pause. Because it is the rule of thumb of the Islamist ideological strategists and propagandists, followed by their Islamo-leftist allies. Since the assassination by young Islamists of the professors Samuel Paty (in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine on October 16, 2020) and Dominique Bernard (in Arras on October 13, 2023), we can see that the calls to “fight Islamophobia” have multiplied, as if the true danger were not Islamism but Islamophobia. In these instances we find a good example of the ideological inversion of reality.

Islamo-leftists are the auxiliaries, for the most part not conscious of being so, of the Islamists in the political and cultural space. While one must show no weakness

in the face of the Islamo-leftist offensive, one must also be careful not to fall into the trap set by the Islamists, by confusing the fight against Islamism with a fight against Islam and Muslims. That would push all Muslims to join forces with the Islamists.

There are many French citizens, on the right and on the left, who consider *Islamism*, in any case, to constitute a serious threat to national cohesion and the exercise of their freedoms. Can they be declared “Islamophobes”? This is clearly an abuse of language and a confusion strategically maintained by the Islamists themselves, followed by the leftists who have taken their side. These concerned and vigilant citizens are, in reality, “Islamism-phobes.” And they have excellent reasons for being so, in view of the massacres committed by the jihadists, the separatism advocated by the Salafists, and the strategies of conquest of the Muslim Brotherhood! But they have nothing against *Islam* as a religion, open to being criticized, like any religion.

About the Author

Pierre-André Taguieff is a philosopher, political scientist, and historian of ideas. His books in French on this topic include: *L'imposture décoloniale: Science imaginaire et pseudo-antiracisme* (Paris: Éditions de l'Observatoire/Humensis, 2020); *Liaisons dangereuses: Islamo-nazisme, islamogauchisme* (Paris: Hermann, 2021); and *Le Nouvel Opium des progressistes: Antisionisme radical et islamopalestinisme* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. “Tracts,” 2023).