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The Israeli-Palestinian conflict seen by the Spanish left from the Gulf War today

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The first aim of this work is the analysis of the image of the conflict between Israel and Palestine in the newspaper of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) *Mundo Obrero*, and in its theoretical organ *Nuestra Bandera*, from the Gulf War to the present day. Since the end of the Labor governments in 1977, all the Spanish left has been increasingly critical about the Israeli government's policy, and sometimes of Israel as a nation. Although a secondary global power, Spain hosted in 1991, the Conference for Peace, prior to the Oslo Accords of 1993, with the intent of normalizing relations between Israel and Arab countries. The most important aim is to study links and differences between anti-Zionism (criticism against Israel's policy) and a remote anti-Semitic tradition with roots in some Arab countries since the birth of Israel.

State of the art: left-wing anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in Spain

Most of the literature in English about the links between anti-Semitism and the left [Brustein & Roberts, 2015; Cesarani, 2004; Herf, 2006; Hirsch, 2017; Jacobs, 2017], does not consider Spain, except for Wistrich, who denounces the openly pro-Palestinian policy of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004-2011) [Wistrich, 2012: 581-582]. In regards to France, we can read Michel Dreyfus's book *L'antisémitisme à gauche* [2009] and, in more recent decades, Olivier Wieviorka's *La tentation antisémite* [2005]. These works raise questions on whether anti-Semitism has roots only in the right, and if in the left it is accidental, or part of its main doctrinal contents. For Dreyfus, the answer is no. As far as Spain is concerned, the long philo-Semitic tradition of nineteenth-century liberals was a powerful obstacle to the development of anti-Semitism on the left. The comparative study *The socialism of fools? Leftists Origin of Modern Anti-Semitism* [Brustein & Roberts, 2015] defends the thesis that there are deep relations between the left and anti-Semitism, thus arguing against two commonly accepted ideas. First, that the left has played no role in promoting anti-Semitism in the political discourse. Second, only the right engaged in anti-Semitic rhetoric. For the authors, anti-capitalism is not the only link to anti-Semitism, as there are at least two others: the Catholic vision of Judaism as a backward religion, and the Jews' social withdrawal, an obstacle to their integration into national communities.

Anti-Semitism within the Spanish left has not been studied systematically enough. Fernando Bravo Lopez's PhD thesis establishes links between two distinct terms, anti-Semitism and the hatred of Muslims, in his work referred to as the term "islamophobia". Gonzalo Álvarez Chillida dedicates a few pages to leftist anti-Semitism [Alvarez Chillida, 2002: 207-213 & 465-470]. He shows that some

left-wing thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century broke away from the pro-Semitic narrative of Spanish liberalism, due to their struggle against Catholic's intolerance, a deep-rooted tradition in the country's history. Indeed, anti-clericalism on the left often pushed the Spanish progressive currents to defend the Jewish cause.

Alvarez Chillida also argued that the influence of French thinkers like Proudhon or Toussenel is perceptible in Spain. For instance, in the works of Sixto Camara, anti-Semitism is shaped by the centuries-old association of Jews with bankers. While recognizing their role in the history of humanity, in his book published in 1849 *La cuestion social. Examen critico de la obra de Thiers titulada De la propiedad*, he argued that the Jews had taken over all European countries, ruling over the entire continent. At the end of the century, successful novelist Vicente Blasco Ibanez defined Jews as persecuted, and, later on, an emancipated people who ruled the economy. His targets were the two great politicians of the era, Sagasta and Canovas, whom he presented as the lapdogs of the Rothschild family. This was his populist way of drawing attention to the frantic speculation by foreigners on the Spanish mines and railways, as well as on its national debt. Occasional anti-Semitic remarks can be found in the works of socialist politician Fernando Garrido and anarchist Fermın Salvochea. On the other hand, the vision of a supranational Jewish religion encouraged some liberals to assimilate the Jews with the Jesuits, also called "black Judaism", and who were hated by Romero, Quiones and Blasco Ibanez. With the Dreyfus Affair, manifestations of anti-Semitism ceased, before re-emerging in Blasco Ibanez's novels *Los muertos mandan* (1908) and *Luna Benamor* (1909). Later on, after 1917, Jews and Bolsheviks were accused of fomenting a conspiracy to build a global empire. To put it simply, for Alvarez Chillida [2002: 211], "anti-Semitism did not spread, more generally speaking, through the late nineteenth-century Spanish Left, probably because of the presence of the current philo-Semite revision of the history of Spain".

Another chapter of Chillida's book deals with a new form of left-wing anti-Semitism after the Six-Day War [Alvarez Chillida, 2002: 465-470]. According to him, the European Left followed Stalin's turnaround about Israel in 1949, shifting from supporting this country to a persistent anti-Zionism that lasted even through the period under consideration here (1991-2015). Israel's alignment with the US, the adherence of Arab populism to the movement of non-alignment, yet closer to the USSR, Palestine as an exemplary opponent against the oppression of US imperialism, all contributed to fuel an anti-Zionist feeling that, according to Alvarez Chillida, should not be confused with anti-Semitism, since the criticism of Israel's government policy at a given time cannot be equated with the attribution of essentially negative characteristics to the Jews. Interestingly, the example he quotes in this sense is not Spanish but Italian: the reaction of Primo Levi to the massacres of Sabra and Shatila in 1982, under the Begin government, in an interview with Giampaolo Pansa for *La Repubblica* [Levi, 2000]. However, Alvarez Chillida also acknowledges that some Spanish anti-Zionists share a certain number

of typical anti-Jewish commonplaces, and that the anti-Zionism of some "is only a new label to denounce the criminal character of the eternal Jew" [Alvarez Chillida, 2002: 469]. This critical shift from the state of Israel to anti-Semitism thus proves to be quite easy, based as it is on two accusations. One, that Israel is a capitalist *bourgeois* state linked to imperialism (of the United States), and second that it is an expansionist country harming Arabs and Palestinians. This would justify the assimilation of the Zionists to the Nazis. These two perspectives were expressed in the *Mundo Obrero*, the periodical of the Communist Party of Spain. I analyzed this publication from the time of the Gulf War (1990-1991) until 2005. Additionally, I researched the positions of Podemos, a movement founded in 2015 on the theoretical bases provided by Argentinean philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the press of this political organization, the discourse about Israel proceeds in four ways: identification, asymmetry, being the vector of foreign forces, and implicit negation.

Sources and definitions

The organ of the Communist Party of Spain *Mundo Obrero* started in 1930 as a daily paper, then a weekly, and finally, due to lack of economic support, a monthly from 1991 on. *Nuestra Bandera*, the theoretical medium of the Communist Party of Spain, pays little interest to the Israeli-Palestinian question in the considered timeframe, except for the period of the Gulf War [Laso Prieto, 1991].

It is often difficult to distinguish anti-Judaism, which has a religious origin, from anti-Semitism, which marks the Jews both as inside and outside a national community, by endowing them with permanent characteristics. And to distinguish them both from anti-Zionism, which consists of criticizing the State of Israel, or Israel's policy, for example, at the time of Begin [Herf, 2006; Hecker, 2011].

While Spain has a long anti-Judaic tradition - linked to the formation of a composite monarchy whose only foundation of unity was Catholicism - anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are less prevalent in the country, firstly because in Spain, in 2001, there were fewer than 20,000 Jews, compared to some 600,000 in France. For General Franco, it was not the "Jew" who serves as the social scapegoat essential to the cohesion of the community, but the "Red" (the word was applied to all the left, not only to Communists). This explains why Franco's attitude towards the Jews shifted in the 1940s. He let some of them pass into Spain but allowed one of his pro-Nazi ministers to make a list of 6,000 Jews to be delivered to the Germans [Reverte, 2010; Israel Garzon, 2007]. Anti-Zionism appeared within the extreme right in the 1960s, as well as in the anti-colonialist spheres.

Four bridges connecting anti-Zionism to anti-Semitism

In general terms, under the anti-Zionist umbrella, we can find the critique of the politics of a state whose existence is recognized, but at the same time denied under the guise of pacifism and the defense of an oppressed people. The analysis becomes even more complicated when examining the different

tendencies and phases of Zionism. There were supporters of an orthodox religious state as well as of a secular state, of a multinational state and of the numerical crushing of the Arab minority, together with a socialist Zionist trend. The difference between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, between criticism of Israel's policies and calling for the destruction of Jews, was reaffirmed in the year 2000 by the communist monthly *Mundo Obrero*: "Zionism treats all Palestinians and other non-Jewish inhabitants as second rank citizens. Fighting Zionism has nothing to do with fighting the Jews. In fact, many progressive Jews have always expressed themselves against Zionism".

However, there are some ambiguities between anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic discourses. According to Mitchel Cohen, both discourses are usually fueled by insinuations, complaints, clichés, and recriminations [Cohen, 2017]. In fact, we can add that the matrix of anti-Zionist discourses grows at the same time as the formation of the Zionist movement, and not only from anti-Semitic people.

This is patent in his Victor Klemperer's personal diaries, [1999], in which he discusses the process through which the Jews were uprooted from Germany through banishment from society and extermination by the Nazis, and that led to a desire for new roots in Palestine. As in nineteenth-century Spain, persecution is seen by Klemperer as the reason that explains the actions of the Jews of his time. A supporter of the idea of assimilation, Klemperer defined himself as "Liberal and German, forever" (November 12, 1939), and was very critical of Zionism for the following four reasons we find in posterior discourses. For this reason, I propose to go back in time to the 30's and 40's.

First, Klemperer criticizes Zionism because it replaces the narrow nationalism of Germany with a similar approach: "We hear a lot about Palestine now. It does not appeal to us. Anyone who goes there exchanges nationalism and narrowness for nationalism and narrowness. Also it is a country for capitalists" [people who have 10 or 15,000 DM] (July 9, 1933). It is a position close to that of Max Aub, a Spanish writer exiled in 1939, who refused in 1967 to claim his Jewishness after returning from his trip to Israel, as can be read in his diaries [Aub, 1998: January 12, 1967]:

I thought I had something Jewish not because of the blood (poor blood, what does it know about that?) but because of the religion of my ancestors - my parents weren't Jews - and I came here with the idea that I was going to feel something, I didn't know what, that I was going to face myself. And there was nothing. I have nothing to do with these people that is not the same thing as with others, as I have nothing to do with the Germans, nor with the Poles, nor with the Japanese, nor with the Argentinians. My links are with the Mexicans, the Spaniards, the French and some, perhaps, with the English. Perhaps more with the Spaniards, but only, perhaps, with those of my own time.

No, I do not have anything Jewish. I'm sorry, but I cannot cry, they are strange to me, as much or even more than the Norwegians or the Turks.

Secondly, Klemperer defends the aspirations of the Arabs settled in Palestine before the Jewish migrations, presented according to an unfavorable class position. The French translation adds a significant element, that is the influence on him of Nazi propaganda :

I cannot help myself, I sympathise with the Arabs who are in revolt there, whose land is being 'bought'. A Red Indian fate, says Eva. In recent days once at the Blumenfelds and visited Gusti Wieghardt once. In remembrance of the Gerstle case, Gusti rails against the 'dirty Jews' in Palestine, capitalists falling upon the Arabs. [After this, in the English translation appears a [...] but in the French one we can read just after: Education to antisemitism by the Nazis?"] (November 2, 1933).

Thirdly, he denounces narrow nationalism, based on the search for common roots, for blood justifies in his eyes the assimilation between the Zionists and the Nazis:

To me the Zionists, who want to go back to the Jewish state of AD 70 (destruction of Jerusalem by Titus) are just as offensive as the Nazis. With their nosing after blood, their ancient 'cultural roots', their partly canting, partly obtuse winding back of the world they are altogether a match for the National Socialists" (June 13, 1933) and "And in what way are the Zionists different from the Nazis ? People treat reason as if it were the most minor and harmful aspect of a whole human being" (October 18, 1936).

Klemperer repeats this concept three times, but adds a nuance in his diary entry of January 10 1939. The Jews become, in his eyes, backward barbarians because they let themselves be dragged by the Nazis into a world of discrimination between races and communities. While it is possible to say that settlement projects in Uganda and Palestine predated Nazism, for Klemperer, Nazism provided a new impetus that had to be resisted.

Fourthly, Hitler appears as the indirect promoter of Zionism, which justifies Klemperer's criticism:

The pure or the religious Zionist cause is something for sectarians and of no importance to the majority, very private and backward like all sectarian matters, a kind of open-air museum, like the Old Dutch village near Amsterdam. It seems complete madness to me, if specially Jewish states are now to be set up in Rhodesia or somewhere. That would be letting the Nazis throw us back thousands of years. The German Jews concerned are committing a crime –admittedly one must grant them extenuating circumstances– if they agree to this game. It is part of the *Lingua tertii imperii* that the expression 'Jewish people' appears repeatedly in the *Jüdische Nachrichtenblatt*, that there are repeated references to Jewish states or Jewish colonies to be founded as dependencies of an ideal Palestine. (January 10, 1939)

The first three arguments we have just showed from Klemperer's diaries were taken up in the Sixties and Seventies by the global Left, and lasted despite the vicissitudes of international politics. However, the difference between Aub and Klemperer on the one hand, and the left parties on the other, is their assimilationist view of people of Jewish origin, making them full members of the nations in which they live. Especially after the Gulf War, Spanish communists, in case of an armed conflict between Israel and Palestine, always supported the side that appears more oppressed, for both ideological and financial reasons.

In *Mundo Obrero*, the identification between Israel and the Nazis intensified over time, first in 1990, and then after September 11 2001, during the Iraqi War. The Spanish position is similar to that found in European communist circles. Border controls "are reminiscent of Nazi practices with Jews," claims Isam Salem in the interview "*La paz es lo mejor*" ("The peace is the best", *Mundo Obrero*, No. 7, March 1992, p.15). Such parallelism is not new, and in line with the Palestine Communist Party (PCP). Since its creation, the Party supported the Arab Palestinians without hiding its admiration for the Muslim Brotherhood. The *Histadrut* union was often referred to as "Nazi" by the PCP, which did not take offence to the collaboration between Arabs and Nazis [Wistrich, 2012: 566-568].

The Communist Party of Spain denounces the escalation of murders committed by the Racist Government of Israel, that using Nazi methods of action is leading a whole people to the height of despair (Press release of the Communist Party of Spain published in *Mundo Obrero*, No. 120, September 2001.)

An asymmetrical conflict?

Usually, anti-Zionist propaganda relies on the asymmetrical or dissymmetrical nature of the conflict, portraying Palestine as the defenseless victim of an imperialist or colonial Jewish power. On the first page of the article dedicated to Israel in the theoretical review of PCE's *Nuestra Bandera* in January 1991, this idea is expressed with a photograph. In the foreground, an Israeli soldier, viewed from the back, his body forming a well-defined triangle, a rifle hanging on his back and a baton extending his right arm, is ready to strike. In the background, a group of supposedly Palestinians are on the floor. The background, blurred by the shallow depth of field of the picture, puts the emphasis on a totally asymmetrical conflict (*Nuestra Bandera*, n°148, page 44), that corresponds in part with a real asymmetry in the military field.

In the communist press, only Palestinians are presented as victims. The Israeli victims are erased, in the same way as the Palestine Communist Party turned a blind eye to the pogroms perpetrated during the inter-war period. The use of children in combat, in the front line, and for propaganda, in the form of images that seek to arouse the viewers' feelings, is a crucial element of this asymmetrical representation of the conflict (*Mundo Obrero*, n°127, avril 2002, «Palestina sangra»).

This asymmetry justifies the demands of both the PCE and the new Leftist organization Podemos (from 2015), such as the recognition of the Palestinian state and the pressure of the international community, helper of the Palestinian heroes [Bustindoy & Perejil, 2016]. But they don't take into account these two elements: that Israel is surrounded by the Arab nations with their regional ambitions, and that the Palestinian cause has received financial, military as well as communication support from Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, and from the European Commission. *Mundo Obrero* becomes *de facto* a platform for the *Comité de Solidaridad con la Causa Árabe*, founded in 1986 with the following purpose:

"To approach the reality of the Arab world, its problems and the aspirations of its peoples to the solidarity of the progressive and alternative sectors" and "to influence the external projection of the Spanish State traditionally turned towards Hispanic America".

The targets of propaganda of the *Comité de Solidaridad con la Causa Árabe* are the alternative sectors of the left. The Communist monthly, the favourite one, published many inserts, texts by its director Carlos Barea, and proposals of subscriptions to the magazine *Nación Árabe*. This is a pan-Arab project that does not take into account the national options chosen by countries such as Egypt or Turkey, and which includes Palestine, new forum for popular emancipation and the torchbearer of solidarity-based internationalism after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Anti-Zionism, always a complement of the anti-British and anti-American tradition, intensified after 1991. These newspapers are popular among supporters of a secular, peaceful state of Israel, but overlook the fact that Israel is surrounded by Arab states, the aims of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, and of the supporters of openly terrorist organizations such as Hamas whose aim is the destruction of Israel and the Jews of the Middle East. In *Mundo Obrero* we see a reversal of the burden of terrorism, as Israel becomes a terrorist state paid by the US, and Palestinian terrorists as a "resistance" in a state of "self-defense" [*Mundo Obrero*, 2002, N°128 & 129]. Álvarez Chillida has overlooked the penetration of pan-Arab and pan-Islamic propaganda in the circles of the Spanish left. *Mundo Obrero* is a platform for Palestinian or Arab leaders, such as Mayed Nassar, Nassar Ibrahim, Omar Khattabi, and Marwan Abdulal. Hussein Triki, representative of the Arab League in Hispanic America, is clearly anti-Semitic. For him, Zionism is part of the global Jewish conspiracy, and anti-Semitism is a Jewish instrument of criminal domination in Palestine. His book entitled *Here is Palestina* was translated into Spanish and French, but not into English, and his theses repeated by Hezbollah. The Communist may also have a debt with Islamo-Marxism, that was theorized in the Seventies by Ali Shariati [Wistrich, 2012: 563].

It is also to be noted that even if the open denial of the state of Israel is rare in the columns of *Mundo Obrero*, it remains nevertheless implicit. It consists in claiming that Israel is a creation that resulted from the Balfour Declaration, and therefore cannot have an existence of its own. Extending this, it presents Israel as a US puppet, or as the "policeman of North American imperialism", "a dart planted among oil-exporting countries" [Bollo Muro, 2001]. The claim of manipulation is mirrored by the propaganda, like that of the German magazine *Adler* at the height of the Second World War, which presented the King of Transjordan as a "puppet" of Roosevelt, or, in 2003, the opponents of Saddam Hussein as "puppets" of Bush. The strategic interest of the Jewish state in the eyes of Great Britain and the US can hardly be denied, but their policy was less one-sided than alleged by the leftist discourse. First, the British sought to limit illegal Jewish immigration by the imposition of resource conditions, and played the Arab card in 1939. And second, before Trump's presidency, North

Americans did not finance Israel with lost funds. The country had to produce value in order to honor its debts, which supposes its existence as a nation.

A simple, non-dialectic interpretation

In *Mundo Obrero*, there is quite any trace left of the debate of the fifties to the seventies on the nature of Israel: democratic nationalism or form of colonialism? In conclusion, it is clear that the PCE's organ departs considerably from the dialectical materialism of the Marxist tradition that looked at events not in isolation, but in terms of relations to conditions, and in motion. The theoretical basis is considerably weakened, and both the relations between social classes and between imperialist powers are evaded in favor of a binary vision on the "good" colonized Palestinians against the "wicked" and rapacious Israelis, white doves against hawks.

Since the realization of the Zionist project, there is permanence of sympathy for the Palestinian cause, and a persistence of the assimilation between Zionist Jews and Nazis. The worsening of the conflicts after the fall of the Communist bloc seems to have gone hand in hand with the hardening of anti-Zionist positions and the diffusion of uninhibited anti-Semitic positions in the opinion, especially under Aznar's Government (1996-2004). For Spain, 2004 was a key year, with a change in government, and therefore also of certain political alliances. Following the Islamist attack of March 11th 2004, the new Prime Minister, Rodríguez Zapatero, distanced himself from the United States and openly supported the Palestinian cause.

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