

A Sociological Perspective and Strategic Perspectives on today anti-Semitism

1. In our *multicultural-globalized world* both transnational interconnectedness and ethno-cultural heterogenization are the rule. A reality that experiences both some comfort and also acute tensions. In this latter respect, one may speak of xenophobia, racism, stereotypes, discrimination and antisemitism. All different notions that describe to conflictual relationships.

Xenophobia means hostility toward people seen as “not belonging”. It targets ‘outsiders’ carrying assumed noxious attributes (Le Cour Grandmaison). *Racism*, according to Memmi valorizes or devalorization biological-genetic differences setting groups on unequal footing – i.e. an ideology of race supremacy. *Stereotypes* generalize *a priori* images of given categories of individuals.

Discrimination means differential responses to different populations.

Anti-Jews sentiments – i.e. anti-semitism - belong here. They can be traced back to Alexandria in the 3rd century in narrations which ridicule Jews’ laws separating them Jews from others in the city. Under the Romans, such antagonisms came up to rebellions and bans of Jews from Rome because they refused to worship the Emperor as a god. Christianity worsened the Jews’ plight with theological condemnations, discriminations, persecutions and massacres. Jews’ suffering that was supposed to remind them of their murder of Christ. On many occasions, Jews were accused of blood libel and expelled from European countries. Martin Luther was one of the worst enemies. After Jews turned down his offer to convert to the Reform, he spoke of them as "venomous beasts, vipers, disgusting scum, devil’s incarnation." Russian Orthodoxy was hardly more tolerant.

In the Islamic world, Jews and Christians were both classified as *dhimmi*s (people of the book) and allowed to practice their religion. A Golden age of Jewish culture in Spain come to an end, however, in the 11th century with pogroms. Though, Cahen and Goitein show that discrimination against non-Muslims was not specifically anti-Jewish, and Lewis contends that Muslims always held negative stereotypes regarding Jews though not hatred - until the 19th century.

2. In 1879, Marr founded the "League for *Anti-Semitism*" and used the notion for the first time. Echoing Richard Wagner’s *Das Judentum in der Musik*, Jews, it was stated, were a "slave race" harmful to the Germans. This hatred of Jews was racist rather than religious. Its “empirical” basis will soon be elaborated by Russian "Protocols of the Elders of Zion".

Antisemitism at this epoch attained the Muslim world. The Damascus affair in 1840 and its following pogroms make up the turning point. The Jewish quarter in Fez was attacked by a mob in 1912 and similar events took place in Algeria, Iraq and Libya. Wistrich contends that today’s calls for the

destruction of Israel by Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, or the Muslim Brotherhood, represent the same mode of genocidal antisemitism.

Though, Europe has for long remained the main scene of antisemitism. The Dreyfus Affair and the Beilis Trial are points of reference while on the other side of the Atlantic, between 1900 and 1924, a resurgence of antisemitism follows the immigration of two million Jews from Eastern Europe. The lynch of Leo Frank by a mob in Marietta, Georgia in 1915 turned the spotlight on that antisemitism.

The worst was still to come of course with the Shoa by the Nazis that literally decimated European Jewry. At a different scale, efforts to eradicate the vitality of Jewry got common in the Soviet Union; their peak was the liquidation, in the 50s, of numerous Jewish intellectuals. While in a decline for some time after the Shoa in the rest of Europe, the Anti-Defamation League reports thousands, of acts of antisemitism in the world per year - harassment, intimidation, threat or physical assault.

All these in spite of new efforts by the Catholic church to promote more positive relations with the Jews. *Vatican II* published, in 1965, *Nostra Aetate* that expunged texts taught in seminaries that legitimized the persecution of Judaism. Such efforts were short, however, to prevent the eruption of a new antisemitism somehow later. Sacks speaks of a genuine 'tsunami' after the Six Day War. For the world opinion, the occupation of Palestinian territories prevented now Israel from positioning itself as a country of passive victims. Antisemitism was again set free.

3. A new factor in Europe in recent decades consists of the ***new European Muslims*** among whom anti-Jewish organizations could recruit followers. Hundreds of incidents at all degrees of gravity are now reported that target Jews and Jewish institutions - a phenomenon commonly called *new antisemitism*. Its peculiarity is its rising under the banner of anti-Zionism. It is unlimited in its criticism of Israel and its demonization. As shown by Forster and Epstein, it displays total indifference to the fears of the Jewish people for survival. Cotler underlines that while classical antisemitism consists in discriminating against Jews, the new antisemitism condemns the very embodiment of Jewishness in the Israeli state. The essence of antisemitism is the same—assaulting whatever is defined as Jewish, but as Fischel shows, this new version is committed to the destruction of Israel and represents a coalition of anti-worldist leftists, vehemently opposed to Israel's policies, and right-wing anti-Jewish racist nationalists and extremists from among Muslim milieus.

These contentions, however, meet reserves on the side of no few scholars. Klug argues that people who support the Palestinians cannot be necessarily accused of antisemitism. Jews who align themselves with Israel attract the hostility of their environment. For Zipperstein a belief in Israel's responsibility for the conflict is "part of what a reasonably informed, progressive, decent person

thinks." Tariq Ali, a British-Pakistani historian, says that speaking of new antisemitism subverts the language at the advantage of Israel.

Pierre-André Taguieff, on the other side, evinces that today antisemitism is not based anymore on racism and nationalism but, paradoxically, on anti-racism and anti-nationalism. It equals Zionism and racism, uses Holocaust denial, borrows third-worldism tokens and disseminates the myth of the "good Palestinian" — the innocent victim.

To be sure, in today Europe, Jews are not victims of institutional discrimination but of stigma, threats may even physical violence. They are also victims of the media which take anti-Zionism for granted. They themselves are suspicious of complicity with Israel. Judeophobia is now a given of the public scene where the harshest statements against Israel are common. One example among many: well-respected newspapers and public figures may dare advising Jews to avoid wearing the Star of David or the kippa in public. Israel being depicted as a criminal entity, fighting it is commanding. No mention is ever made of the genocidal Hamas Charter.

All these show that not only Israel is at stake. Judeophobia blames the Jews in general for their so-called nationalism, that is, their solidarity. The defense of Palestinians erected in victims of Zionism legitimizes anti-Jewish violence - as the "revenge for Palestinian children killed by the Zionists," a theme that draws from the old "ritual murder." Jean Genet, a respected writer, said once: One cannot be pro-Palestinian without being anti-Jewish. Many BDS militants articulate this kind of arguments and their hatred of Jews finds justification in their version of human rights.

In brief, the demographic changes in the European population have given birth to a monster: the new Judeophobia that is gaining amplitude in recent years through a large spectrum of acts (Kantor 2012), especially on campuses where BDS campaigns aim at any form of associations with Israel.

4. Zygmund Bauman (1998) reminds the notion of *allosemitism*. This notion first coined by Artur Sandauer assesses that non-Jews' attitudes toward Jews are radically different from any other category of people. Close to allosemitism, *proteophobia*, designates an object as not just "unfamiliar" but in essence, unfit to the general order of things – unrelatedly to time and space. It is a permanent interrogation. Vis-à-vis Jews, says Bauman, allosemitism combines with proteophobia: Jews are an eternal object of negative reference accounted for by the interplay of historical developments and actual circumstances. The combination of allosemitism and proteophobia focuses on "Jewishness" rather than Judaism: even when Jews shave their beards to fit prevailing norms, they cannot kill antisemitism. As said by antisemite Rühls and confirmed by Litwak, whatever Jews do, they remain with their *unique Volkseigentümlichkeit* (*people peculiarity*). Bauman (1998) recalls

Gombrowicz for whom Jews' unnerving uniqueness goes back to centuries; for Cioran, a Jew represents the alienated man *par excellence*. He is the one who will never be from here. The source of allo-Semitism, says Bauman, is the Jews' rebellious posture against the divine order. They refuse to pass away even when persecuted and haunt the world as living fossils. Jews gave birth to Christ but disown him. Ever since, allo-Semitism is endemic to western civilization as the embodiment of disorder. Bassi reminds the Jewish joke about antisemitism, according to which the Titanic catastrophe was caused by Jews: Iceberg is a Jewish name, isn't?

Though, anti-Jewish stereotypes are a plethora, and not only among Jews: a Christian who steals is a thief, a Jew who steals is a Jew. With the creation of Israel the Jew was, for a while, on the side of anti-colonialism – Israelis then were often praised as “different Jews” - but after 1967, Jews stood again on the ‘wrong side’. Pro-Palestinian attitudes turned often antisemitic favoring Holocaust negationism assuming in the open that the Shoah is an invention of the Zionists.

When modernity erupted, Bauman pursues with Jacob Katz (1982), emancipation opened the door to the pariah's successful assault on prestigious professions. The Jews were the low moving up, and thus instilled in the higher spheres the fear of going down. This is decried by Dumont, the ideologue of antisemitism,. Into this Europe of nations, states, and nation-states, Jews did not fit in, having only gypsies for company. Jews are dispersed, the epitome of incongruity: a non-national nation. Bauman quotes Hannah Arendt's reporting about German Jewish exiles in France saying: 'We have been exemplary Germans, there is no reason we could not be exemplary Frenchmen.'

In the postmodern era, however, it is also Bauman's hypothesis that allo-Semitism is finally coming up to an end. Politics today, he says, is increasingly wrapped in identity conflicts rather than national or class contradictions. Ethnic differences are no more seen as temporary nuisances; social life revolves around the establishment and protection of distinct identities. Hence, Jews cease to be “special” and their claim to distinctiveness is but one voice among many. Though, in actual fact, what we learn from Taguieff and many others invalidates this optimistic perspective: we must state that allo-Semitism definitely remains of actuality and continues to challenge the Jews.

5. An additional point is *allo-Semitism as perception*. By proposing allo-Semitism for the analysis of the non-Jew's attitude toward Jews, in some way, scholars – who are most Jews themselves - also express how Jews may understand non-Jew's attitude toward them. In other words, allo-Semitism is also a model of perception by Jews of how they are perceived by non-Jews. In this, allo-Semitism becomes is a hypothesis pertinent to the study of how Jews interpret antisemitism. An hypothesis that

asks if Jews do view antisemitism as a permanent given of their condition or, alternately, as the outcome of conjunctures. Each mode is bound to different reactions.

From a historical viewpoint, we know that as victims of hatred, Jews displayed all over the centuries a varied gamut of reactions: suicide, conversion to Christianity or Islam, emigration, embracing mysticism. *Self-hatred* is often quoted, that is, endorsing that “Jews are bad by nature”. Theodor Lessing's *Der Jüdische Selbsthass* ("Jewish Self-hatred") shows the amplitude of this phenomenon among Jewish intellectuals. A neurotic pattern that accepted the assumptions of the anti-Semite.

Gilman comments today: One of the forms of this Jewish self-hatred is virulent opposition to the existence of Israel." Jewish self-hatred is often disguised as anti-Zionism. Wasserstein contends that many Jews have "internalized elements of the anti-Semitic discourse, and tend to surrender psychologically. A by-product consists in self-distinction from others Jews. Jackson reminds how German Jews distinguished themselves from *Oostjuden* in the late 19th century, or Southern France Jews from Alsacians at the beginning of the same century. Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* tends to describe Israelis, thirsty of revenge, in similar disparaging colors.

6. In the context of the all-above, we may ask: what **strategy** is most appropriate to fight antisemitism effectively today? Bassi sees no other way out than ‘dialectic assimilation’: assimilating non-Jewish elements in Jewish culture and adopting new patterns of behavior and speech that might disarm antisemitism. That is, creating a ‘non-different other.’ Ben Halpern (1987), speaks of *duplicating norms* prevalent with non-Jews and erasing the condition of “Jews as a distinct tribe.” Somehow these approaches echo Heine who said ironically: to be a Jew is not a failure, it is a catastrophe.

Deborah Cohen (2002) shares an contrasting view. Jews who get less visible, she contends, only worsen the non-Jew’s feeling of being threatened by them. She quotes Finkelkraut: Racial hatred and its blind rage were essentially the Jews' punishment for no longer placing their difference on display. Genocide was not imposed on the Jews in spite of their efforts to assimilate, but in response to this very attempt.

Though, the search for ‘liberty from Judaism’ does not necessarily imply conversion. As reminded by Bassi, the attachment of many Jews to revolutionary parties may be explained by the aspiration to create a society where to be a Jew does not matter anymore. And indeed, the number of Jews who joined Communism and Socialism forces in Russia, Germany and other countries is most impressive.

Other responses endorse the principle of changing reality but without getting rid of Jewishness – on the contrary, through asserting it as a collective attribute. The Bund aspired to drag Jewish workers in the struggle for socialism but advocated their right to establish a Jewish nationality. Bolshevism in

Russia and Nazism in the rest of Europe decimated the Bund and the only collective attempt to extract Jewry from antisemitism remained Zionism. The return to Zion has always been an aspiration of Judaism ever since the Middle Ages, Judah Halevi, Yehiel of Paris and Nahmanides. Obadiah ben Abraham created a Jewish administration in Jerusalem in 15th century and Yosef Karo wrote the Shulchan Aruch in 16th century Safed. At the end of the 19th century, Leon Pinsker published his *Auto – émancipation* (1882) and the continuation is well-known.

Though, most Jews today find significance in their diaspora Jewishness and express it in many ways: from schools, museums and media to clubs, synagogues or institutes. Jews also sustain bodies to respond on their behalf to antisemitism. As shown by Meltzer, these bodies are able to protest and give expression to dismay and anger. These bodies, however, have to stand the fact that even in this era when numberless collective identities have become legitimate and call for recognition, Jews still appear as a kind of unicum. Multiculturalism is far from deleting the saliency of Jewish particularism; with the backup of other circumstances, it rather seems to amplify allosémitisme.

In this respect at least, it is no doubt that Jewish history has not come to an end, yet.

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