

**Political antisemitism and its christian antecedent.
Trying to make sense of nonsense**

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Abstract

The central thesis of this paper is that political antisemitism cannot be understood without taking into account what should be regarded as its Christian foundation proper, the perception and stigmatization of Jews as dangerous aliens. By introducing the differentiation between an ‘chimerical anti-Semitism’, a product of the pre-modern mental set-up, often generated by Christian religious phantasmagoria, and a modern anti-Semitism with concrete references to social relations in industrial and post-industrial societies with a trend to associate exclusively Jews to societal ills, it is argued that the latter can be regarded as an ideological construction which represent the rationalization of deeply inbred preconceptions about Jews as radical aliens and as bearers of a set of negative characteristics. The article presents a reflection on the Christian origins, the development of Jew-hatred during the Middle Ages and the early modern period and discusses the extension of secularized anti-Semitic conceptions in various European societies as well as the main observable topical patterns of judeophobia in modern times. Three forms of exclusion can be identified: the exclusion of Jews from emergent national communities during the nation building process as ‘national aliens’ of an extreme sort; racist anti-Semitism, based on the phantasm of Jews as ‘racial aliens’ and grounded in the idea of the racial division of humanity; and a picture of the Jews as a monstrous - because consciously hidden – other as an reaction to the process Jewish ‘assimilation’. The paper comes to the conclusion that concrete references to social relations and social functions of judeophobia do not suffice to explain it in a satisfactory manner. This cannot be accomplished without reference to the discussed Christian historical foundations.

Introduction

Nonsense in the title of this paper¹ would mean something resisting to rational interpretation, that is statements which cannot be understood via standards of a normal intellectual procedure, and this for at least two rather specific reasons. Antisemitic discourses attempt the explanation of various facts of social life with reference to a societal phenomenology of sorts based allegedly on historical reality related to Jews. The latter are regularly accused of spectacular forms of misbehavior, as judged by established norms of social coexistence,

¹ I used already this subtitle in the chapter dedicated to “The Road to the Shoah” of my book: *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era. A Socio-Historical Outline*, (Budapest - New York: Central European University Press, 2004), 299-386. The reflections hereafter owe a lot to insights gained from the research project funded by the European Research Council in Bruxelles on the ‘Formation of educated elites in multi-cultural East Central European societies’ (2009-2011).

which either belong to quite imaginary constructions, lacking any empirical foundation or proof, or – on the contrary - apply (or might apply) to non Jews as well. In the last case Jews are affected by various formulations of (antisemitic) ignominy while non Jews of similar status and condition are not. There is a highly selective depreciation of Jews as malefactors, while non Jews of comparable standing are exempted from similar infamy.

The first case can be qualified as ‘chimerical anti-Semitism’,² typical of pre-industrial societies, a product of the pre-modern mental set-up, often (indeed overwhelmingly) generated by Christian religious phantasmagoria (such as the blood libel calumny, the accusation of the desecration of the holy host, the reproach of Jews poisoning wells and causing illnesses, like the plague, etc.). The second case has concrete references to social relations in industrial and post-industrial societies with a trend to associate exclusively Jews to societal ills. Chimerical antisemitism is beyond argument. It is not falsifiable in rational terms, depending as it is on unquestionable, common convictions, shared by a number of people in contact with each other, beliefs in extravagant and nasty fairy tales of sorts. (What is the content of truth of ideas about Jews needing the blood of Christian youngsters for Passover rituals?) The second one could be discussed in terms of social science categories if they were seriously applied to realities in modern times without pre-formed anti-Jewish bias. The share of Jews in capitalism or communism may be and has indeed been already studied in the framework of its due socio-historical setting, contexts, conditions and motivations without justifying any of the antisemitic preconceptions. All the accusations addressed to Jews as capitalists or communists – when sustainable – can be addressed to Gentiles as well. Those who draw such anti-Jewish conclusions, appear to be clearly guided by pre-established judgments. The problem here is linked to the quite general observation that the ‘chimerical’ motifs and the alleged social references are usually intricately mixed in this matter. Apparently modernist justifications of antisemitism carry heavily archaic elements recognized or accepted by their adepts as historical givens.

Hence my initial statement that antisemitism can be regarded as ideological constructions which represent the rationalization of deeply inbred preconceptions (inherited or transmitted over generations) about Jews grounded in two types of propositions. The first ones concern the fundamental difference between Jews and non Jews in social space – the distinction of Jews as radical aliens. The second ones attribute a set of negative characteristics and nefarious collective agency to Jews as such. None of these convictions can be interpreted in causal terms as regards social reality. Rather they belong to the category of obsessions, beliefs, self-fulfilling prophecies or constitutive pieces of mental and dispositional *habitus* (in Bourdieu’s sense) as unquestionable convictions generating attitudes and various forms of (anti-Jewish) actions and

² This highly illustrative expression was suggested by Gavin L. Langmuir opposing chimerical, realistic and xenophobic statements about outgroups, like Jews. See his book Gavin L. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), especially 326-357.

behaviors.³ One author proposed the term ‘social code’ for the latter situation, when *judeophobia* turns into a consensual marker of membership in a social cluster, like in nationalist middle class circles of Wilhelmine Germany.⁴

Once this said one cannot dispense with a reflection on the historical origins of how such habitus could develop, gain wide range influence and become a dominant ideological pattern in some historical junctures of modern European and even extra-European societies. A reflection on the Christian origins will introduce the discussion of the extension of antisemitic conceptions in various European societies as well as the main observable topical patterns of *judeophobia* in modern times.⁵

The Christian heritage⁶

Christianity emerged initially in ethnically Jewish populations of the near East as a Jewish sect with an obvious need to distinguish itself from traditional Judaism. The very importance of the spiritual affiliation of Christianity with Judaism – the conservation of the Hebrew Bible as a central source of the faith with the development of the idea that the Church represented the ‘Second alliance’ of God with humanity via Jesus Christ, after the ‘First alliance’ struck with the Jewish people – enhanced the need of the fixation of firm theological frontiers between Judaism and Christianity. Given such ‘Semitic spiritual origins’ of Christianity, ritually maintained in the canonical sanctification of and recourse to the Hebrew Bible (the ‘Old Testament’) as a fundamental holy reference, a recognition particularly stressed since the Reformation and the

³ See for example Pierre Bourdieu et Jean-Claude Passeron, *La reproduction, éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement*, (Paris: les Éditions de Minuit, 1970), 46-47. The *habitus* in this sense refers precisely to a product of some sort of inculcation (pedagogical action) which must last sufficiently long in order to produce the interiorisation of arbitrary cultural properties capable of self-perpetuation even after the cessation of the pedagogical action.

⁴ See Shulamit Volkov, “Antisemitism as a Cultural code. Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook XXIII* (1978): 25-45.

⁵ For a seminal and concise interpretation see Helen Fein, “Explanations of the Origin and Evolution of Antisemitism”, in *The Persisting Question. Sociological Perspectives and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism*, ed. Helen Fein, (Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 3-23.

⁶ Given the fact that the present essay is a modest contribution to a general theory of *judeophobia*, historical references will be limited and only specially targeted in this presentation, with only occasional references to the current literature, the scope of which – immense – would frustrate any attempt at representativity. Most of the factual historical evocations can be documented – among other sources – in the recent, second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Detroit, New York, etc.: Thomson and Gale, 2007) or *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, vol I-II, ed. Gershon David Hundert (New Haven – London: The Yale University Press, 2008). To these sources must be added classical treatises like the works of the late Léon Poliakov. I mostly used the original editions of his *Histoire de l'antisémitisme*, vol. I-II, (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1981), (3d edition) and *Le mythe aryen*, (Paris: Complexe (new edition), 1987). See also Jerome A. Chanes, *Antisemitism. A reference handbook*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004) and *Antisemitism. A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, 2 vol., ed. Richard S. Levy, (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2005).

Counter-Reformation by all the Christian Churches, the formal self-differentiation and self-distinction of Christianity against Judaism was from the outset a theological necessity of sorts. But this would not inevitably involve *judeophobia*, as has been amply proved by a number of Christian initiatives going back to the Middle Ages and more specifically, with sometimes long-lasting effects, since the Reformation. This elaboration of the difference from Judaism was indeed specifically embodied in several sects (often considered as 'Judaizing' ones by other Christian Churches), notably among the Anti-Trinitarians. Such kind of *judeophilia* of various intensity and nature could be restricted to the sense of the importance granted to the Hebrew spiritual background (hence the spread of Biblical culture via translations of the Testaments into vernaculars), but could also reach (like in some Eastern European Protestant groups) a level of identification to Jewry as a persecuted religious minority. There have been even cases of collective conversion to Judaism among radical Protestants. The friendship with Jews or – failing this – the condemnation of antisemitism as an obligatory Christian commitment has come to be more or less systematically and officially proclaimed (or at least paid lip service to) as a basic tenet, by most established Christian Churches since the Second World War, especially in the *aggiornamento* of the Catholic Church following the Council of Vatican II (1962-65). But this must be interpreted as a belated reaction to and compensation for Christian complicities with Nazism. In fact, originally and by and large throughout its history, the mainstream ideological message of Christianity was heavily anti-Jewish. In many ways most often the Christian Churches at best tolerated, promoted and supplied a set of motivations for anti-Jewish discourses and behaviors, and, at worst, supported, initiated and organized anti-Jewish movements and persecutions.

The foundations of Christian anti-Judaism were laid already by the early Church Fathers (like Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine – as early as in the 4th and 5th century) in their definition of the Christian faith in clearly *judeophobic* terms.⁷ Jews were taxed as outcasts among Christians on two scores. They carried the heritage of their 'original crime' as Christ killers on the one hand and, further on, they refused the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. This theological 'blindness of the Synagogue', a strong theme in the Catholic message since the early Middle Ages, exposed them to be set apart in an uncommon, abnormal or illegitimate social status of sorts, hence despised, looked down upon and separated from the rest of the given society. Still their position as a diaspora in European societies remained marked by a dual status. This was made up by submission and dominated status matched with a heavy set of prohibitions, accompanied by a more or less constant menace of repression, let alone exposure to mob violence, on the one hand. But, on the other hand, the Church hierarchy tended to protect the Jews (in whatever

⁷ See Werner J. Cahnman, *Jews and Gentiles, A Historical Sociology of their Relations*, (New Brunswick – London: Transactions Publishers, 2004), 15-16.

miserable situation they may have been) with the theological argument that they must survive as the ultimate witnesses to the truth of Christian doctrine at the expected final return of the Messiah at the end of times. Fundamentally anti-Jewish in its social practice, the Church preserved nevertheless a basic ambiguity in its theological standing vis-à-vis Jews in general.⁸

Since Christianity between the outgoing 4th century (Christianization of the Roman Empire) and the 11th century became progressively dominant and achieved in fact the status of a monopolistic and mandatory faith, though under two separate hierarchies (the Eastern Orthodox and the Western Catholic Christianity), in the big majority of European populations, the Jewish condition in Europe continued to be essentially determined by this duality of Christian *Judeophobia* grounded in theological considerations. But the Church was not the only public power in medieval and post-medieval Europe, even if its policies and ideological instructions remained highly influential in this respect as in others till well after the age of enlightenment. The destiny of Jews was consequently strongly marked by the social, political and economic relations of interest local Jewish communities could negotiate with the worldly powers of feudal and post-feudal states, including the princes, the landed aristocracies and (more and more after the 12th century) the patriciate of free cities. The conduct of the representatives of the Church hierarchy was part of this indeed complex and constantly evolving power structure. It could in local issues, strike or upset the balance between policies, movements and collective actions favorable or unfavorable to Jews. Hence the actual treatment of Jews under Christian religious hegemony varied by tremendously in time, historical junctures and countries with often extremely contrasting outcome. However strong were these differences and variations, some generalizations can be still attempted. More often than not the ruling princes and the landowning class behaved tolerantly to Jews, essentially since they could benefit from the special taxation levied on Jews and the commercial and financial services Jews could perform for them. This was the typical situation under Merovingian and Carolingian rule. The city patriciate on the contrary usually regarded Jews as undesirable competitors in trade and handicraft activities. The low clergy was regularly the most anti-Jewish sector of the Churches, inclined to adopt the *judeophobic* tenets of traditional Christian theology. The high hierarchy opted generally for a more balanced attitude, liable to oscillate between a combination of acts of humiliation, exploitation and protection. Beyond these generalizations the reality of how the 'Jewish Question' was managed by those in power in pre-modern times proved to be changing with the reigns and the historical junctures against a set of rather permanent features. The latter can be analyzed under a few headings: forced separation and isolation, professional prohibitions, collective exploitation and (often bloody) persecutions. The latter were mostly due to self-justifying religious fanaticism or/and 'chimerical'

⁸ For details see Rosemary R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide. The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, (New York: Seaburg Press, 1974).

(invented, imagined) motivations, notably via the ‘scapegoat effect’ - responsibility laid on Jews for the ills of life.

Christian policies, implemented for the forceful isolation and exclusion of Jews from Christian society, met of course the practices of Jewish self-separation, a major strategic scheme for community maintenance, survival, reproduction and sometimes even self-defense. This applied clearly to residence, which for observant Jews must be at walking distance from prayer houses for obvious ritual reasons. But this self-imposed residential discipline was systematically subject to restrictions enforced from outside either through measures of compelled concentration in ‘Jewish streets’, in town centers (since the 16th century ghettos, especially in Western and Southern Europe) or exclusion proper outside city limits. Most of the times residential rights, that is, toleration of settlement, had to be negotiated by Jewish communities with the landlords that be, more often with the king or the aristocracy against special taxation. Permission of residence was even then only a concession, since Jews were more or less systematically denied the right of ownership of immobile property up to the period of emancipation on the one hand, permission of settlement could be (and was often) withdrawn without notice, on the other hand. The same exclusionism applied to matrimonial mixing, sexuality in general, schooling, the use of public services (like hospitals) and conviviality in everyday life. Even the admission to and physical presence at market places was strictly and restrictively regulated for Jews. Jewish temples and prayer houses were generally allowed in backstreets and in Jewish neighborhoods only, often without distinctive facades suitable to a place of cult. But forced social isolation could (and was frequently) imposed also by mandatory clothing or other derogatory signs of being Jewish. All this has amounted to transforming Jews into aliens, radical aliens at that, irreducibly inferior to ‘normal’ Christian people.

The system of professional prohibitions was an essential complementary mechanism of constrained isolation. After many and long historical variations, by the high middle ages Jews were practically everywhere excluded from the main economic occupations of the rank and file Christian population (agriculture, corporate industries, civil service) and assigned to very few activities, like certain forms of trade, craftsmanship (outside established corporations, especially restricted to the market of the very Jewish community), management of landed properties, tax-farming, money businesses (usury, change, pawnbroking, etc.), medical profession. Since, following precepts elaborated among others by Thomas Aquinas, Christians were not allowed to engage in monetary dealings, banking services became a Jewish specialty, even if this theologically grounded prohibition was not strictly observed in every quarter of Christendom. The ‘usury privilege’, though often observed, was never exclusively reserved for Jews.⁹

Anyhow, the professional restrictions had at least three kinds of visible

⁹ See Cahnman, “Jews and Gentiles”, 45-63.

consequences. Due to their often strong position as distributors of credit, Jewish financiers could occasionally accumulate huge amounts of mobile capital, so as to serve as indispensable fundraisers for feudal states, aristocrats or even Church dignitaries (court Jews, *Hoffaktoren*). Second, thanks to their funds, Jewish bankers could sometimes intervene to help their communities against their enemies (*stadlanut*). But this often exposed them to blackmailing in the crudest manner (by threats of expulsion or extermination), an art in which some of the feudal powers behaved as past masters. Thirdly, the association of Jews with activities as ‘intermediaries’, especially money business, left a strong imprint in Christian imaginations about the richness (and the greediness) of Jews as well as their particular capacity to make money. More importantly, since ‘honest Christians’ would not get involved in similar dealings, usual Jewish economic activities came to be marked by a halo of illegitimacy, fraud, recourse to occult practices. Trade itself, especially outside corporate tracks, was branded as derogatory, certainly not worthy of a gentleman, thus left over to aliens, like Jews. The professional specialization of the latter could thus add to their stigmatization as Jews. Hence a set of stereotypical preconceptions about “treacherous”, “cheating”, “unreliable”, double-dealing, etc. Jews.

But Jews were more or less everywhere systematically over-exploited as Jews in traditional Christian societies. The quite general rule was that Jews should pay special taxes in most countries simply for their existence, to be ‘tolerated’ – a concession considered as a ‘protection’ by those in power. Such taxes could be due to landlords allowing Jewish communities to get established, build a temple or organize public festivities. States could impose such taxes or cities to admit Jews to markets, to stay temporarily in its walls or to settle down. Blackmailing Jews with the menace (or the practice) of arbitrary annulment of bills of debt (*totbrief, lettre morte*) was a habitual exercise of feudal rulers. Such threats to extort money from Jews could comprise expulsion, implication in blood libel or other ‘chimerical accusations, withdrawal of legal protection against mob rule, exposure to the inquisition (since the 13th century). Jews were exposed to tallage ruthlessly at will. Such practices could be implemented and generalized also because Jewish communities were reputed to readily bring assistance to their brethren in need. All this has contributed to generate or confirm the image of Jews as liable to be over-exploited on two counts. He is powerless and cannot resist even the most irregular or illegal measures to make him pay. So it is not mandatory that moral conventions or even the common law of Christian society should apply to Jews and non Jews alike. He can always mobilize assets when necessary out of unknown and supposedly illegitimate sources, since “he has money even under his skin”. If not, he can count on collective ‘solidarity’. In these preconceptions the stereotypical ingredients of powerlessness and super-power (or occult power) attributed to Jews achieved a subtle combination.

Finally the actual persecution of Jews in various forms – pogroms, organized mass murder, inquisitorial trials, destruction of prayer houses or Jewish literature (burning of the Talmud), arbitrary expulsion, confiscation of

property, extortion of money under menace, forced baptism under mortal threats, etc. -, if not permanently operated, remained always at the horizon of what was possible to do to Jews in Christian societies. Expulsion from Western states and cities became a general practice touching most of the old Jewish communities established in Europe since the early Middle Ages, starting in England (1290) and completed in Spain (1492) and most Germanic cities in the 16th century, hence the progressive resettlement of the vast majority of European Jews from the West to the Polish-Lituanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire. This pattern of forced population transfers were maintained and often resorted to up to the 20th century in countries where the emancipation of Jews was delayed (Russia, Romania) or cancelled (as in Nazi Germany and its acolytes). But by the late Middle Ages (since the 12-13th centuries) Christian Europe had produced a set of new 'chimerical' accusations wielded indiscriminately against Jews and gaining wide range popular support. The main reference for these calumnies, soon achieving standardized formulations, was a number of collective phantasms about the dangerousness of Jews as enemies of Christianity. Christian imagination had in a way reattributed its own prejudiced mental products to Jews, especially under two forms. Since Jews were allegedly hostile to Christians, this must be expressed in various acts of antagonism against or destruction of Christian symbols or people. Hence the anti-Jewish libels of the ritual murder, the poisoning of wells or the desecration of the holy host. But more generally, Jews were also made responsible of all the ills nature happened to inflict upon the rank and file population (whether they were Jewish or Christian, by the way), like the plagues, floods, earthquakes, etc. Jews thus became universal scapegoats for human suffering. By this, insidiously, the Christian representation of Jews accomplished its final anti-Jewish objective, to stigmatize Jews in a universalist register.

Secularisation of the Christian heritage

The term itself is dated from the years around 1873 (copyright owing, supposedly, to the German political journalist and agitator Wilhelm Marr), but secularized patterns of anti-Jewish discourses and actions occurred much earlier, going back to the period of the Enlightenment, when the ideological foundations of modern nation states had been laid. The nation building process was accompanied in the central zones of the continent – from France to Russia – by outbursts of anti-Jewish violence with utterly or mostly secular references. Still, and this is the central thesis of this paper, modern secular *judeophobia* cannot be interpreted and understood without taking into account what should be regarded as its Christian foundation proper, the quasi-universal diffusion of the perception and stigmatization of Jews as dangerous aliens and – as such – social outcasts, an attitude apparently prevalent in pre-modern Christian societies only. It does not appear to have existed in the Muslim world

in any comparable manner. Moreover, it has proved to be historically much less visible in Christian societies under Ottoman occupation up to the 19th century (like in the Balkans). Closer scrutiny would actually show this radically negative image of Jews varying a lot in social space and geopolitical setting throughout the contemporary era, so much so that, generally speaking, it had incomparably less impact in the European periphery (the perimeter of the Mediterranean – outside the European colonial populations -, Britain or Scandinavia) than in the continental core countries.¹⁰

If one tries to introduce the customary socio-historical factors of interpretation of similar ideological constructions (the local proportions of Jews in the population, religion, ethnicity, levels of urbanization, degrees of modernity in terms of literacy and education, economic development, etc. of the host society), the conclusion would be that they explain little or nothing at all about prevalence of inherited anti-Judaism. Such investigations (and many have been undertaken) yield equally ambiguous results about the temporal-chronological variations of anti-Jewish outbursts in modern times. They may be – as they indeed often were – but also not at all connected to social crisis situations. More importantly it is easy to identify transnational geopolitical relationships between antisemitic movements, circles, parties, organizations with convergent, though not always identical objectives, proclaimed motivations and modes of action.

Whatever such diversity might have been, its major condition of possibility could be only the ‘Christian heritage’ in his respect, the historical construction of the image of Jews as those of primordial culprits of sorts elaborated by almost two millenaries of Christian anti-Judaism. More than that, this fundamental *judeophobic* tenet included in practical terms the popular idea that normal rules of social togetherness should not necessarily apply to Jews, since they are ‘radically others’ indeed. They can be always struck by suspicion of anti-social, extravagant or disruptive behavior, thus Jews can be just as well exempted from ‘normal’ morally and even legally correct treatment.

This idea of stigmatized ‘social exceptionalism’ of Jews, based on in-bred Christian preconceptions– should have become obsolete in the post feudal era with the progressive secularization of European societies that ensued from parallel processes of industrialization, social and cultural modernization and the legal equality (objectified also by the emancipation of Jews everywhere in Europe by the 1870s – except in Romania and Russia), which was established and guaranteed under parliamentary nation states. The multiplicity of reasons why this did not happen may be reduced to two, of which it is not difficult to trace the direct or indirect connections with traditional Christian anti-Judaism, indeed sometimes to its most archaic forms.

The first such reason for the remanence of anti-Judaism to be taken into account is simply the slow progress, incomplete nature and insufficient degree

¹⁰ For a classical overview see Reinhard Rürup, *Emanzipation und Antisemitismus. Studien zur “Judenfrage” der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), especially 93-119.

of secularization (in terms of a total change of the mental set-up of erstwhile Christian religious clusters).¹¹ In many ways the Christian Churches have continued to diffuse the old anti-Jewish precepts habitual in feudal times, in some places up to the present. In the political controversies accompanying the emancipation process of Jews and the secularization of European societies, the Churches took regularly position (even before the French Revolution) for the maintenance of their public influence (including matters non religious) – which meant often an anti-Jewish stance. The historic examples can be multiplied, ranging from the Dreyfus Affair in France to the laws of religious policy in Hungary (1894-96) or the *Kulturkampf* in Wilhelmine Germany or the unification movement of Italy. As a consequence, in spite of the *aggiornamento* of Roman Catholicism and the official friendly conduct to Jews of other Christian confessions, it may occur in the early 21st century that Jewish kids suffer from aggression as descendents of ‘Christ-killers’ in various parts of Europe. The Christian references groups may still act as factors of anti-Jewish attitudes, prejudices and conduct in otherwise modern social environments, as shown by various contemporary surveys.¹² Modern antisemitism has still a large number of archaic, ‘chimerical’ references, like the blood libel, given credit to in apparently secular and allegedly highly developed societies (like the ‘*rumeur d’Orléans*’ in France of the 1960s). Moreover, much after the formal proclamation of civic equality of Jews, most modern European parliamentary states - let alone those which did not endorse the policy of emancipation – continued to discriminate against Jews on formally religious grounds in various fields, however illegal it could prove to be following the legislation in force. This applied particularly to the admission to the civil service, political mandates, the army officer corps, decision making positions in state run economic enterprises or at least some of the branches of the latter (the diplomatic corps, army staff, representative personnel of civil administration, etc.). Modern states like the very liberal Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, proclaiming and for all practical purposes realizing the equality of citizens before the law, maintained that Jews should get baptized in order to make advanced careers in public employment. This operated as an official recognition that in spite of legal equality (the Hungarian parliament granted in 1895 even to the Israelite confessional community full collective rights and state support like to ‘historic’ Christian Churches), the state maintained unofficial but efficacious discrimination in the job market under its control. The old Christian rejection of Jews as social outsiders and religious aliens, as

¹¹ Such continuity was also stressed in a classical study by Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction, Antisemitism, 1770-1933*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 318-327.

¹² See for example Walter R. Heinz, Steven R. Geiser, “Eine kognitive Theorie des Antisemitismus im Kontext religiöser Ideologie”, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 23, (1971): 519-543. Harold E. Quinley, Charles Y. Glock, “Christian Sources of Anti-Semitism”, *Anti-Semitism in America*, eds. Harold E. Quinley, Charles Y. Glock, (New York: Free Press, 1979).

well as confession based subtle forms of discrimination is implicitly, quasi unawares still in order, directed particularly against Jews even in some of the most advanced modern Western democracies at some level of public professional trajectories. Being Jewish by religion or descent could still be an argument against candidates to 'visible' or 'nationally sensitive' positions even in Communist countries displaying radically anti-religious dispositions. Paradoxical as it may appear, such secular and atheist dictatorships, feeding on an egalitarian state ideology, could capitalize on discriminatory preconceptions deriving originally from Christian prejudice.

The last example is conducive to the second main reason of the continued impact of Christian anti-Judaism in modern times. This has to do with the facility with which the traditional Christian version of the stigmatized Jewish religious difference could be transmuted into modern definitions of Jews as radical aliens. The communist case constitutes a borderline situation where discrimination (and in several instances the murderous persecution of Jews like after the Slansky trial in the 1950s in Czechoslovakia or in the Soviet Union during the last years of Stalin) on utterly secularized forms of a preconception about the distinctive 'Jewish difference' as well as the 'social danger' they represent. Such 'essentialisation' of sorts attributed inadvertently to the 'Jewish difference' could occur to be in the collective or institutional unconscious a mere transposition of Christian preconceptions. The discursive structure of the argument about Jews betraying the Communist party (as it came to the fore in the Slansky trial) is the perfect equivalent to the idea surviving in Christian rituals about Jews having betrayed Jesus Christ.

In modern constitutional democracies at least three other different formulations of stigmatized Jewish otherness have received accreditation as a follow-up of the Christian definition of Jewish alterity.

First Jews have tended to be excluded from emergent national communities during the nation building process as 'national aliens' of an extreme sort and – precisely for that reason - not liable to become members of the nation. In limit cases, like in Romania or Russia during the long 19th century, this state ideological tenet prevailed consensually during the long 19th century even in circles of political liberalism. Elsewhere states with assimilationist policies (like in the West or in Hungary) fought uphill battles in the 19th century against this preconception with more or less success. A halo of suspicion that Jews were not (and could not become) 'real Frenchmen' or 'real Hungarians' just like others is still haunting their public image with at least tacitly *völkisch* references. In modern settings this could be regarded as a late avatar of the requirement of the *purezza del sangue* (purely Christian origin) of members of the state service centuries after the forced mass conversion of Jews in Spain or Portugal around 1500. Nationals were alleged to need common physical, demographic, residential and cultural 'roots' which the Jews could not display. Such *Blut und Boden* ideology pops up even in political discourses or off record utterances of 'democratic' politicians, especially since the establishment of the Israeli state, demonstrating the deep penetration and reception of the preconception in the

collective subconscious of elites in otherwise egalitarian societies. (After an anti-Jewish terror act in the 1970s a French prime minister spoke - apparently without actual second thoughts - about 'Jewish and innocent French victims' of the aggression...). Rightist nationalists of the *Action Française* proclaimed in the inter-war years openly that Jews were not part of the French nation on religious grounds. They shared though this qualification of aliens (*métèques*) with Protestants and Freemasons...By the outgoing decades of the 19th century (since the 1870s) nationalist *judeophobia* started to be reorganized and reformulated in movements of political antisemitism with reference to the arguments that Jews were not only aliens, but also enemies of European nations. We must return below to this, since it came to represent in various disguises the most widespread reference for anti-Jewish discourses, agitations and actions in the 20th century.

The second formulation is grounded in the idea of the racial division of humanity which – via social Darwinism –, started to be exploited in a *judeophobic* direction since as early as the second part of the 19th century. Racist antisemitism, based on the phantasm of Jews as 'racial aliens' and, as such, supposedly enemies of 'normal' (non Jewish, that is, Christian) society, had achieved its full fledged ideological perfection with wide range public success all over Europe even before Nazism turned it into a murderous state doctrine, later justifying the *Shoah*. It constitutes the most elaborate form of anti-Jewish prejudice in modern societies, which can be regarded as a simple naturalization of the age old Christian representations of the radical otherness of Jews. One can consider discriminative *judeophobic* racism as a version of 'chimerical anti-Semitism', with the difference though that the physical (or genetic) particularities of Jews, or at least some Jewish populations, emanating from closed-in demographic isolates, may prove to be scientifically demonstrable, just like those of any other groups with similarly segregated background. Physical differences, however real they may be – they visibly exist between rank and file Greeks, Slaves or Swedes inside Europe - could not though justify anti-Jewish discriminations without the pre-constructed image of the Jew as dangerous radical alien belonging to the Christian heritage. Anyhow, racist antisemitism was the most accomplished alter ego of Christian anti-Judaism in secular terms, strong with the apparent authority of reputedly 'scientific' justifications.

The public success of antisemitic racism achieved its most complete formulation by the end of the 19th century precisely in the period when – by their language, in their way of life, via their economic or social standing and behavior, even in their weakening confessional commitment thanks to advanced secularism - Jews tended to be less and less distinct from Gentiles in the public space of modern nation states. This was due to the long process of their 'assimilation', acculturation, social and political integration as normal citizens following (sometimes even preceding) their civic emancipation and cultural modernization. Precisely in this period, besides the racist rejection, the less and less significant distinctiveness of Jews in terms of their anthropological

culture, tended to be reinterpreted as more or less monstrous - because consciously hidden - forms of otherness. This could happen, once again, on the strength of the survival or unconscious take-over of Christian anti-Jewish preconceptions and their projections into traces of remaining perceptible Jewish difference. Insufficient secularization could play here, obviously enough, a substantial role. The subsistence of cohesive anthropological traits of even highly assimilated Jewry in various terms – whether in gastronomy, verbal culture, bodily techniques, the expression of emotions, educational investments, habitat, tastes, family relations, child rearing patterns, proclaimed inter-group solidarity, etc. – could also contribute to set Jews apart in the eyes of prejudiced observers. Jew-hatred, generated through such excessive extension of the significance of perceived (supposed or projected) tiny differences, could actually operate even without the demonstrable existence of such differences, due to pre-established prejudice. A perfectly ‘assimilated’ Jew – speaking and behaving exactly like any other citizen - could be spotted as ‘unduly normal’ : looking like others was liable to be regarded as simple mimicry, not ‘fit to Jews’, an enactment or a mockery of sorts which, on its turn, could reinforce *judeophobic* suspicions against Jews as ‘dissimulators’, ‘infiltrators’, ‘born traitors’, ‘usurpers’, etc. Such prejudice based perception of Jews draws directly on the established stock of Christian anti-Judaic preconceptions in the disguise of projections of essentialist negative distinctions on collective traits which would, otherwise, be considered as socially meaningless.

The logic and the references of secular antisemitism

Without easily acceptable and communicable arguments such projections could not be efficient and gain in some milieus, strata, historic junctures and societies wide range recognition – offering motifs of mobilization for anti-Jewish actions and movements. These arguments, contrary to the purely ‘chimerical’ (imagined, invented or theologically constructed) Christian accusations leveled against Jews, had usually two sides. One of them was a reflection on recognizable characteristics of at least some Jews. Thus there was here some relationship with socio-historical realities. The second consisted of a generalization, a blowing up of sorts of the collective traits referred to on the one hand, an often monstrously negative interpretation of it on the other hand. The latter could not be developed though, once again, without established Christian preconceptions of Jews as suspicious social outsiders. This can be proved by the fact that – whatever the anti-Jewish conclusion drawn from the argument may have been – the same derogatory accusations would usually not be formulated against non Jews with similar givens or of identical social standing. Modern antisemitism justifies the hatred of Jews by the phantasmagorical aggrandizement of the specific (often just alleged) cause from which it draws rational arguments and by its exclusive association with Jews.

Jew-hatred in modern times displays a (not quite closed) list of references which can be summarized, though inexhaustibly, as follows.

The first one, political antisemitism, has been mentioned already above as the by-product (or infantile disorder) of romantic nationalism typical of the early phase of national awakening and nation-building. It was not unknown in the West but it was much more emphasized in late emerging nations states of East Central Europe (Germany included). It came to full bloom in the 1870s when a number of local parties and movements espoused its tenets, giving rise even to transnational antisemitic associations and organizations, but some of its origins go back to the period of the French Revolution and its aftermaths. Among its multiple patterns, besides the allegation (already discussed) that Jews could not become full-fledged members of would-be nations because of their fundamental otherness, Several could claim long standing popular success.

The first one consisted of various fantastic theories of the Jewish conspiracy against society or even the world. The earliest formulations of such preconceptions date from the French Revolution, supported by the fact that the revolutionary National Assembly was the first in history to grant formal civic equality to individual Jews (1790-1791) - following to be sure the implicit implementation of Jewish emancipation in the constitution of the United States (1787). This was enough to develop throughout the 19th century a number speculations about the subversive inclinations of Jews and their occult power directed against Christian society and established social order. The most extravagant incarnation of such complot theories was a forgery of the Tsarist secret police *The Protocols of the Wise Men of Sion* (1905), an infamous fake, achieving world wide distribution. (Its publication in America was funded by Henri Ford and the script is still at present a popular reading in Arab countries, serving the purposes of Anti-Israeli propaganda).

Racist antisemitism, as dealt with above, can also be classified in the category of political antisemitism, since it became a major mobilizing theme of reference for the extreme right in many countries (even if far from all, especially in post-1945 West) during the 20th century. It was formulated in its most achieved version by Richard Wagner's son-in-law Chamberlain (a born Englishman turned into a Pan-German ideologue), preparing the ideological infrastructure for Adolf Hitler's future National Socialist Workers' Party.

But political antisemitism could be backed up by less phantasmagoric arguments, more concrete objectives and realistic targets since the 19th century, when in most European countries Jews entered into public life, notably in the political arena. Due to the fact that the demand for the emancipation of Jews and the preservation of their civic rights was, in modern times, mostly on the agenda of leftist or liberal opinion makers or those in conservative circles which proclaimed the same principles (like in Disraeli's Britain). Jews tended to side with similar movements and parties all over Europe. This could trigger off anti-Jewish reactions in opposite camps, whereby preformed antipathies against Jews could be combined with the representation of strictly political interests and options. With the crisis of classical parliamentary democracies or

the failure to realize such regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, the search for new societal projects multiplied by the end of the 19th century. This was the period of the emergence of a number of social utopias attracting Jews because they promised – among other things – the final elimination of the rest of anti-Jewish discriminations. Some Jews became active agents of the spread of such programs all the more because they had acquired - thanks to the very process of ‘assimilation’ - a more modern mental set-up than their rank and file Gentile counterparts. This made them free to espouse or even invent or contribute to the construction of the doctrines of ultimate modernization, be it connected to humanist freemasonry, feminism, esperantism, socialism or communism.¹³ The enemies of these movements did not have a hard time to combine their hostility with Jew-hatred, drawing part of their political capital from anti-Jewish prejudices. The re-qualification of leftist and liberal parties in East Central Europe as properly ‘Jewish’ was already far advanced in Eastern and Central European authoritarian regimes of the inter-war years, though not in every versions of fascism. The fact that Italian fascism or, for that matter, most similar regimes around the Mediterranean hardly indulged (or only in a soft way and lately, once entering in alliance with Nazi Germany) in political or racist antisemitism, this seems to prove that such exploitation of latent Jew-hatred or the official sponsoring of *judeophobia* depended strongly on local cultural and political traditions. Anyhow, precisely on the strength of such traditions, when and where they existed, anti-Bolshevik trends in the 20th century regularly developed antisemitic elaborations. Some of the crisis situations after World War I (and the loss of the war itself) was imputed to Jewish machinations (the *Dolchstoß*-legend) in defeated Central Europe. Such political conceptions survive even today in form of anti-Jewish sensitivities (sometimes achieving publicity in public discourses as well) in several post-socialist countries, including those without any sizable Jewish populations whatsoever (Poland, Romania). This fact does by no means imply that – historically, up to the present – antisemitism could not be instrumentalized in strategies of mass mobilization or scapegoating for social ills in leftist movements and, most institutionally, in the Stalinist machinery of fight against arbitrarily targeted ‘enemies of socialism’.

The most paramount anti-Jewish charge in modern times was indeed grounded in anti-capitalism. It had elaborations of quite contrasting political shades, leftist and rightist or conservative as well. The equation Jews = capitalists was proposed already by the young Marx (himself of Jewish descent). It was largely taken over by the early ideologues of ‘utopian socialism’ or even the French syndicalist socialists (starting with the founding fathers like Blanqui and Proudhon) up to the Dreyfus Affair. The high level of Jewish participation in socialist movements, especially since the second part of the 19th century, and the ensuing *judeophobic* accusations, did far from discredit the parallel

¹³ See my study “Les Juifs, la modernité et la tentation communiste. Esquisse d’une problématique d’histoire sociale”, *Le communisme et les élites en Europe Centrale*, eds. Nicolas Bauquet and Francois Bocholier, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006), 85-105.

accusations, often emanating from the same political quarters, that Jews had 'invented' and developed capitalism with all its misdeeds to their own benefit. This was epitomized by the interwar years in the parallel public outrage manifested by Central European authoritarian regimes against 'Jewish plutocracy' and 'Judeo-Bolshevism'. Both had indeed elements of social reality, still none of them were lacking 'chimerical' (monstrously imagined) ingredients. The credibility of the anti-Jewish target of anti-capitalist opinion had obvious references. Since the Jewish financial oligarchy of feudal states had often performed, thanks to their forced professional specialization, major functions in public funding (as *Hoffaktoren*), their descendents not infrequently succeeded in the establishment of the network of modern credit institutions, indispensable for economic modernization. Some of these bankers' dynasties (like the Rothschild) became emblematic figures in Europe (much less in America) of the 'monetary power of Jews'. More generally many entrepreneurial Jews shared the burden and the profits of what Marxists would call 'the primitive accumulation of capital' in the early decades of industrialization. Among their initial advantages enabling them to do so one can count their know-how in rational economic calculation (developed through centuries of financial practices - the positive outcome of the professional prohibitions they were exposed to), their proto-bourgeois mental set-up and social stratification (same cause), their high level of literacy (a produce of the traditional 'religious intellectualism' of their faith), their readiness to geographic mobility (forcefully acquired via centuries of often constrained migrations) which facilitated their settlement in cities serving as centres of modern economy, as well as the fact that - not entitled to invest in immobile property before emancipation - they had easily mobilizable assets only at their disposal (when they had assets at all) in the capitalist *Gründerzeit*. All this has indeed produced some spectacular cases of success due to the entrepreneurship of highly gifted Jews, especially in financial markets and trade, but also - more particularly in Central and Eastern Europe - in the foundation activities of big industry and modern cultural infrastructures (the press, publishing, film making, etc.). But in all these activities Jews had only a minority participation most of the time in most places, while they often had to shoulder exclusively the responsibility for the social disruptions attributed to capitalism. Such selective stigmatization of 'Jewish capitalism' both in socialist or anti-modernist circles could not help being invested with a strong element of scapegoating. The above (in a shortcut) enumerated socio-historical conditions of distinctive economic mobility among Jews - distinctive *embourgeoisement* proper, the target of the anti-capitalist *judeophobia* - was matched by their exceptionally rapid intellectual modernization on the highest available level. This could serve as reference to all kinds of anti-modernist crystalizations of Jew hatred, especially in the underdeveloped Eastern part of the continent. Late emerging national societies or states (above all those with Catholic or Orthodox majorities) remained indeed marked by what should be qualified as a serious deficit in terms of under-education in titular rank and file ethnic groups. Some level of

literacy was common among Jewish males even before modern times, due to religious needs and rules. This was accompanied by an often advanced degree of learned (book based) confessional culture, as a central collective value in Jewish communities. Such traditional habit of learning could easily be converted into secular education when public schooling became accessible for Jews and were Jews were motivated to acquire secular knowledge. This happened usually much before the achievement of civic equality, in most of Europe by the late 18th, early 19th centuries. Jews started to invest heavily in public education, though not without resistance opposed by traditionalist Israelite authorities. Their educational proclivities were manifestly dependent upon the liability of success of ‘assimilationist’ strategies in societies open to the social integration of Jews. Advanced education was indeed an essential asset in the success of such existential choices. By the period of high capitalism at the end of the 19th century the educational superiority of Jews against their Gentile counterparts (as indicated by the respective proportions of the younger age groups attending secondary schools or universities) became spectacular all over Europe (wherever there were data for demonstration). This brought about a significant restructuration of middle class social brackets. After a few decades following their emancipation, in some professional branches (like medicine, engineering, journalism or at the Bar) Jewish professionals could take over leading market positions and even constitute locally the majority of their cluster (especially in Central European cities). Thus the educated middle class part became the largest sector of the socio-professional set up in several Jewish populations, while among Gentile equivalents the same strata made up a tiny minority only. A number of consequences ensued from this crass inequality, giving cause for ant-Semitic recriminations.

Manifest Jewish over-schooling was regarded as a positive development in liberal milieus (like in pre-1919 Hungary), but received utterly negative interpretations in rightist authoritarian regimes or circles (as in the ‘Christian course’ of the Hungarian rump state born from the Peace Treaty of Trianon). The latter would consider Jewish advancement in matters cultural and professional as a confirmation of their tenets about the dangerousness of Jews. The ‘Smart Jew’ – a common stereotype among philo- and anti-Semites – was regarded as even more threatening, since he could supposedly cheat upon easier and gain power over Gentiles... Their fast professional career and their entry into fields of activity which, formerly, had been considered as Gentile occupations (like the Bar), tended to exacerbate anti-Jewish hostilities precisely in the very middle class clusters in which Jews were seeking integration via heavy assimilationist efforts. Their success was easily reinterpreted as an intrusion, the illegitimate ‘invasion’ of Gentile middle class positions. Even when there was no congestion of the occupational markets in question, like in early 20th century Germany, student riots against the growing number of foreign students - mostly Jews from Eastern Europe - took on clearly antisemitic overtones. In the inter-war years, with the growth of unemployment of certified intellectuals, anti-Jewish violence became rampant

everywhere in Central European universities (even in the Czechoslovakian model democracy, let alone in Poland, Austria, Romania or Hungary). Hungary actually introduced as early as 1920 an academic *numerus clausus* law to bar the gross majority of Jewish candidates from higher studies in their home country. (This can be regarded as the first ever formally anti-Jewish law in a European country of early emancipation.) Since the 1880s student corporations of the Central and Eastern parts of the continent tended to exclude Jews, even in otherwise liberal Vienna (as it was witnessed in the diaries of Theodor Herzl). By the inter-war years the same corporations or their acolytes turned into paragons of the anti-Jewish agitation and aggressions. In the same period antisemitic organizations also multiplied in the professional middle classes, demonstrating a nasty pattern of sectorial competition for market shares. To this effect the right wing Hungarian National Medical Association went in the early 1940s as far as pressing the (pro-German) government to ban Jews from medical practice. The measure would have deprived the health services of the country of one third of their practitioners...Moreover, higher educational investments, better knowledge of foreign languages and the subsequent open-mindedness as to intellectual innovations, all this rendered educated Jews more attracted to the upcoming ideologies of modernity. But on its turn, this distinctive modernity of many members of the educated Jewish middle class could be and was often translated in rightist interpretations as an objectification of the image of Jews as that of ‘cultural aliens’ of sorts. Anti-Jewish *ressentiments* could hence be justified, generating xenophobic invectives and attacks by conservative circles. The latter analyses, however multifaceted they seem to be, can be summarized under the aegis of a fundamental ‘relative deficit’ of modernity in Gentile elites as against the more rapidly and decisively modernizing middle strata of Jewish communities.

In this rapid overview of the stock of secular references of modern antisemitism the most general, multi-functional motivation – scapegoating for all the miseries of suffering humanity – cannot be treated in all its dimensions.¹⁴ Let it be just mentioned as a reminder of the extraordinary inventiveness of the xenophobic as well as – by implication this times – *judeophobic* mind.

Conclusion

Antisemitism could not elaborate, develop, legitimate and gain accreditation for its multifarious paraphernalia without a number of important social functions this murderous ideology fulfilled for its adherents. Among these functions, some have been incidentally evoked already above. Political antagonisms disguised in antisemitism, competition for market shares of Jewish and Gentile practitioners or entrepreneurs in various intellectual or

¹⁴ See to this an interesting recent overview of the Hungarian historian Attila Pók, *The Politics of Hatred in the Middle of Europe. Scapegoating in Twentieth Century Hungary: History and Historiography*, (Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 2009).

economic activities, efforts at collective self-distinction of social underdogs, the enforcement of a form of symbolic purity of titular ethnic elites in would-be nation states, the implication of Jews in xenophobic reactions against real or imagined attacks coming from outside established national societies, a universalist interpretation of social crises and the ills of modern civilization – all this can be counted in the line of these sociologically demonstrable functions.¹⁵ If there is no space here to offer an even summary analysis of the latter, it is important to remember that, following the basic statement of this essay, such social uses of *judeophobia* do not suffice to explain it in a satisfactory manner. This cannot be accomplished without reference to the above discussed Christian historical foundations, which served for a kind of primitive accumulation of ideological capital, constantly reinvested in contemporary patterns of Jew-hatred, whatever new references the latter could mobilize, added to the old ones. The actual new social functions in question can be only regarded as contingent or supplementary conditions of possibility for the growth of anti-Jewish potential - by the way quite unequally distributed in various societies. They never operate as sufficient individual conditions for its expansion or success. To understand their alas amply attested efficiency, one cannot disregard the Christian origins of modern elaborations of Jew-hatred as a fundamental historical given.

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How to quote this article:

Victor Karady, *Political Antisemitism and its Christian Antecedent. Trying to Make Sense of Nonsense*, in “Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC”, n. 3 July 2012
url: www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=289

¹⁵ I tried to offer details of such a functional model of antisemitism in my book cited above, Karady, *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era*, 309-336.