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OLD JEWS, NEW JEWS:
WHY HAVE ANTI-SEMITISM
AND ANTI-GYPSYISM
SURVIVED AUSCHWITZ?

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OLD JEWS, NEW JEWS: WHY HAVE ANTI-SEMITISM
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The question as posed is a challenge, not only to those who assigned it as a theme to be explored, and not only to those who expect to answer it, but also to all of Europe in which anti-Semitism persistently continues to show its face half a century after the closing of the Death Camps. Five decades separate us from the last days of the Gas Chambers and of the Crematoria, and still the embers of hatred for Jews, for “The Despised Other”, smoulder beneath the surface of post-World War II Europe, erupting spasmodically from Madrid to Moscow. The question as phrased is a direct challenge to all of European heritage precisely because it contains its own answer, an answer no one desires to express or hear, for it embodies a confession of a fundamental flaw in the fraying tapestry that is Europe today after Bosnia. To give voice to the answer, however circuitously, would be to confront head on the centrifugal danger that, if not neutralised, could unravel the process of European unification and integration. The question as put is a classic example of a rhetorical query of a combined question and answer: thus “Why is it so?” implies, at the same time, “Hatred for Jews did not die in Auschwitz; it was not even mortally wounded”. The only question remaining is: “How forthright will the attempt to examine the answer be?” Not how accurate, but how honest? Unavoidably it will be accusatory and, quite possibly, offensive. As one performs cultural vivisection of that which was, still is, and, most probably, will continue to be an attribute of a Europe chronically infected by the virus of continuing anti-Semitism, there has to be, of necessity, a shocked response. Hence the underlying tension of the topic for which the messenger is all too often blamed.

1. The failure of bona fide integration

To begin our analysis we must take a quick glance back into the pre-Auschwitz era, to the century and a half since the mid-18th century Enlightenment, when the ideals of a rationalistic political order promised the onset of a society free from the tyranny of prejudicial *ancien regime* traditions, especially – through Jewish eyes – a society free from the scourges of almost two millennia of Christian (both Catholic and Protestant) animosity and rejection. Over the course of the nineteenth century, on the surface at least, three processes promised to normalise throughout Europe the status of Jews and Judaism within each nation states. This dynamic was triggered by the French Revolution which, as in the new United States, gave birth to an unprecedented metamorphosis of the royal subject-turned-citizen.

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The first of these processes was *emancipation*, the legal enfranchisement of Jews to full citizenship and legal equality. By 1933 – the year of Hitler’s rise to power in Germany – Jews enjoyed, at least in theory, full citizenship in virtually all European countries. The National Socialist counter-revolution brought on a drastic reversal; as of September 15, 1935, with the declaration of the Nuremberg Racial Laws, Jewish citizens in Germany lost their constitutional rights. Not accidentally, in the second half of the 1930s, in many other European countries, the legal status of Jews also became endangered, as in Italy, Poland, Romania, and the Baltic countries. Emancipation foundered precisely where democracy was the weakest.

The second process was *assimilation*, the voluntary decision by Jews, individually and collectively, to adopt the mainstream customs and cultures of their respective countries of residence, including conversion as a culminating expression of loyalty and trust. Voluntary assimilation by Jews of European ways covered a wide spectrum, with or without the granting of full emancipation (citizenship); it ranged from freely learning the languages of the majority populations to various forms of bi-culturalism, all the way to an abandonment of Jewish identity. In many cases, however, complete assimilation failed due to a third factor, integration.

Integration was the sum total of social forces which encouraged or discouraged the assimilation of Jews seeking unlimited access to society in their country of residence. Despite full emancipation, (citizenship status), Jews experienced a range of institutional prejudices that denied them full entrance into societies’ everyday life. For example, in various countries the officer corps, university appointments, and specific government posts were closed to Jews. Thus, like emancipation and assimilation, the process of integration was by no means evenly fulfilled in all corners of Europe. As Hitlerianism exploded onto the stage of Central Europe – an ideology committed to the full rejection of Jews and Judaism – elsewhere in Europe and the world similar obstacles were erected, different only in degree.

The reasons for the European failure to normalise the lot of Jewish minorities were by no means purged out by the drama and tragedy of World War II. As the depth of pan-European collaboration with Nazi genocide demonstrates, the forces of anti-Semitism outside Germany, once unleashed, needed little prompting by the Nazis to adopt annihilationist proportions. From France to the Soviet Union, wherever Germans occupied, there was no shortage of voluntary participation in the continental-wide war of extermination against the Jews. Allied regimes (*e.g.* Italy), puppet satellites (*e.g.* Slovakia), and occupied peoples (*e.g.* Ukrainians and Latvians) eagerly joined the ranks of the genocidists to expunge Jews from *all* over Europe. When the war came to an end in May 1945, and Europe lay in ruins, the ranks of the murderers were dissolved, but the age-old cultural stream of Jew-hatred which had nurtured them remained fundamentally unscathed. A series of deadly anti-Jewish pogroms in 1946 in Soviet-liberated Poland rang the opening round. Which leads us to the next segment of our search for an answer.

2. *From hatred to genocide and back to hatred*

Antipathy for Jews on European soil has deep roots, some of them pre-Christian. It could even be argued that the early Church not only generated its own brand of Judeophobia but transmitted specific animosities that antedated it. As heir to much of Roman culture, the Church brought with it numerous strands of non-Christian, negative dispositions toward Jews and Judaism, beginning with Imperial Rome’s deep suspicion of the Jewish capacity to be loyal to the Empire. Jews’ implacable resistance to anything that might compromise their monotheistic faith, such as did the Roman cult of emperor worship, goes back to the century *before* Rome arrived in the Near East. Indeed, vivid memories by Jews of their military triumph over the Greek Syrians in the Third Century BCE sustained them in their protracted

struggle against the far more powerful Roman armies in the First and Second centuries CE. And, as Christianity became the sole official faith of the late Roman Empire, this same suspicion of Jews as potentially politically unreliable began to gnaw at the hearts of the Church Fathers as they pondered a proper theological response to the Jews in their midst. Increasingly, the demands of a supercessionist Christianity (one that replaced Judaism) forced the Patriarchs to adopt a more radical rejectionist stance *vis-à-vis* contemporary Jews and their religion.

Over the centuries Christian anti-Judaism took many forms, accounting for its multi-tiered character. The first was theological, the systematic delegitimisation of Judaism, by arguing that the Covenant of Sinai had been passed on from the Children of Israel to the followers of Jesus. Invariably, these theological polemics, while lauding the coming of the Christian era, simultaneously depicted Judaism and Jews in obsolescent and demonic terms. The second form of anti-Jewish Church doctrine flowed naturally from the theological perspective that regarded Judaism as unfulfilled prophecy only made real by the birth of the Messiah, and viewed post-Jesus Jews as rejectionists of Revelation and, therefore, as promoters of Untruth. The Church, even as it taught the Word, was continually forced to preach against its living mortal enemy, the Jew. Hence the unbroken tradition of divinely-sanctified, hate-filled Christian doctrine that included severe proscriptions (policy) to protect Christian society from contact with satanic Jewish influence.

Church policy regarding Jews was *never* friendly. It was, at best, but only for brief periods, benignly tolerant. This tolerance broke down much too often into regressive kinds of persecution, from public humiliation and strict, physical segregation and confinement in urban ghettos, to murder and clerically inspired lynch mobs. The coming of Protestantism in the sixteenth century did little to temper Christian Judeophobia; if anything, the diatribes of Martin Luther contributed significantly to Christianity's violent rhetoric against the Jews, an immediate antecedent to physical violence against them.

Despite the partial secularisation of the Christian religion due to the Enlightenment, antipathy for Jews found new outlets. Politically-inspired prejudices manifested themselves side by side with liberal emancipatory reform efforts. Thus, even as a small segment of Europe fought for an accommodation, for a *modus vivendi* with Jews and Judaism, a far larger segment of Europe managed to muster new energies of rejection in the forms of modern reactionary, volkish nationalism, international socialism (despite claims to the contrary) and racism. The first two demanded assimilation, although both, at the same time, harboured and expressed strong rejectionist attitudes. By the time of Hitler both camps also evinced strong racist tendencies.

When National Socialism captured Germany and threatened the conquest of Europe, a wide spectrum of anti-Judaism, spiced with (racist) anti-Semitism, had already taken root throughout Europe. Hostility ranged from virulent pogroms in late Tsarist Russia, to near civil war in France over the Dreyfus Affair at the turn of the century, to the issuance of the infamous and internationally famous *Protocol of the Elders of Zion*, and always there was the persistent motif of anti-Judaism resounding from tens of thousands of church pulpits and Christian religious functions.

Not surprisingly, *despite* Auschwitz, this century-old stratum of antipathy for Jews did not come to an end in 1945. Deeply ingrained habits and customs such as these do not simply evaporate. As soon as the genocidal circumstances of 1933-1945 subsided, traditional European Judeo-hatred quickly resumed its old forms – hatred waiting for new opportunities. These were quick in coming. In 1946, lethal pogroms broke out in Poland; England denied concentration camps survivors from going to Palestine; no country changed its ungenerous immigration policies; Stalin launched a deadly campaign of culturecide and elitecide against Yiddish art and artists in the Soviet Union; the Slansky Trials in Czechoslovakia opened the Pandora's Box of anti-Zionism as a form of anti-Semitism; in 1968, Poland's remaining Jews

were hounded out of the country; in France President Charles de Gaulle dubbed the Jews as an ancient “stiff-necked people”. Then came denials of the Holocaust itself from all over Europe (including Sweden) and from the Europeanised world – from Australia, Canada, and the United States – all this, despite the shadow of Auschwitz which logically ought to have acted as an inhibitor. The pathology of European intolerance for Jews has remained active, preserved in institutions, in traditions, in vocabularies, and is embedded in the psyche of both intellectuals and the masses. Only a fool, a liar, or one struck by myopia could fail to see the revival of anti-Semitism across the entire landscape of Europe, regardless of the political character of each government. Even the American-Soviet divide of Europe failed to make a difference. Antipathy for Jews has resonated on *both* sides of the Iron Curtain, though each has piously claimed to have marginalised it, an expression of unearned self-congratulation but, unfortunately, not a recognition of reality.

3. Confronting the “New Jews”: Anti-Gypsyism

Despite the chronic persistence of post-1945 anti-Semitism, it is no longer the central issue in Europe. The Jews are no longer the primary target, regardless of the terminology of the rhetoric; it is the “New Jews”, of whom there are over six to seven million in Europe. The “New Jews” are the fastest growing indigenous minority in Europe, and they have been in Europe for over seven hundred years. They are not Jews, of course; they are the Gypsies: the *Romani* and the *Sinti*, a complex people scattered throughout Europe, a despised minority in almost every country. All too often they are the “Invisible People”, unseen, suppressed, excluded, and unrecognised, above all hated and victimised.

Along with the Jews, almost in tandem, Gypsies have suffered physical persecution and public malignment, often worse than the Jews. Emancipation passed them by completely; their voluntary assimilation was minimal, and their socio-economic integration almost totally denied. By the outbreak of World War II, Gypsies were already explicitly targeted for extermination by The Third Reich’s architects of racist genocide, even *before* Nazi Germany had decided on the ultimate fate of the Jews. During the war, Gypsies and Jews suffered and were killed together in Auschwitz. And, after the war, traumatised Jews called their catastrophe the Churban, Holocaust or Shoah, while the equally maimed Gypsies named their particular genocidal experience the *Porajmos*.

Today, Europe is sinking into the quagmire of mono-ethnonationalism, and the most vulnerable minority is its Gypsies. As Europe (and the international community) fails to rectify ex-Yugoslavia’s and ex-USSR’s descents into violent ethno-separatism – Bosnia and Chechnya – the haunting spectre of a “Gypsy Problem” rises over all Europe, over all countries with Gypsy minorities and century old traditions of anti-Gypsyism. Just as the Jews of Europe became a “Jewish Question or Problem” in the first half of the twentieth century, so today the Gypsies of Europe are fast becoming a “Gypsy Question” awaiting its “Answer”, or a “Problem” calling for a “Solution”.

Gypsies are stereotyped, almost universally and uniformly, as “lazy”, “dirty”, “less intelligent”, “unassimilatable”, “anti-social”, “thieves”, and “criminals”. In short, they are *not* perceived as an integral part of Europe, as potential citizens. Gypsies, already marginalised before 1989, are even more so today. In countries such as the Czech Republic they “enjoy” citizenship, but are socio-economically rejected. Recently, non-Czech Gypsies were deported *en masse* to Slovakia; in Hungary, there are Gypsy parties, but they have no real legislative power. In most cases the majority of Gypsies exist on the fringes of society. Public opinion polls from Spain to Ukraine all indicate Gypsies as the least tolerated minority.

As economies in Europe shrink, as chronic unemployment rises, as the young educated fail to find satisfactory work, as xenophobic sentiments percolate, as anti-immigration policies try to seal off Europe from “invasions of non-Europeans”, Gypsies are now the most

vulnerable minority on the continent. Croats and Turks in Germany have, at least in theory, governments to speak for them, as do Algerians in France. More significantly, in the event of rabid anti-Semitism, Jews always have Israel to turn to in theory *and* in practice. Gypsies, in stark contrast, like the Jews in inter-war Europe, are territory-less with no place to escape to. Only now are they beginning to organise on an all-European level with but a few sympathisers in national capitals or in the European Parliament. Even the OCSE has taken cognisance of the need to give Gypsies some attention, but has been short on action. The emerging crisis is all too real for anyone to deny it any more.

4. *The reality of the crisis*

Europe is presently in the throes of a world-wide and accelerating upheaval of ethno-separatism and mono-ethnicity: in Europe this is evident in Ireland, in Basque Spain, in the Caucasus beginning with Chechnya and Abkhazia, and very close to home, throughout ex-Yugoslavia. Exclusivist ethnocentric centrifugal forces in the name of regional and/or cultural autonomy are proliferating throughout Europe. The desire for ethno-uniformity reverberates through parties across the political spectrum. Worse, the recent US-brokered Dayton Plan for Bosnia has provided an international *imprimatur* to the unprecedented principle of mono-ethnic territorialism; Bosnia is literally being engineered *de facto* into three internationally approved ethnic cantons. The US, NATO, the Council of Europe, and the UN have all separately given their blessing to this “solution” for Bosnia, and, by extension, signalled to other disaffected ethnic movements that what is happening in Bosnia under the eyes of NATO – the formation of mono-ethnic statelets – may be legitimate elsewhere.

None of this bodes well for Europe’s Gypsies. Already serious precedents have been set by European governments, both old and new, *vis-à-vis* Gypsy refugees seeking haven from persecution and war. Two years ago, thousands of Gypsies fled post-Ceausescu Romania to Germany to escape from lethal violence, social oppression, and economic suppression. Once in Germany, they were kept apart, falsely classified as Romanians (a prevarication buttressed by most of the national press), and then forcefully shipped back to Romania. Secretly, Germany had arranged to pay the Romanian government to “take back” its citizens. Throughout the negotiations, the Romani were never referred to as Gypsies, only as Romanian “nationals” or “citizens”. Thus, the truth was disguised from most of an unsuspecting world. No civil rights organisation has monitored the fates of these unfortunate Gypsies after they were forced to return to Romania. They have, so to say, conveniently “disappeared”.

Similarly and silently, the government of Croatia summarily dealt with thousands of Gypsy refugees crossing the border from Bosnia. The government of President Franjo Tudjman carefully separated the ethnic Bosnian Croats out from the Bosnian Gypsies and promptly sent most of the latter back (to date the exact number remains unclear).

Nevertheless, in the light of these threatening events and uninterrupted assaults on individual Gypsies across the entire length and breadth of Europe, Gypsies have little to celebrate since Auschwitz. Of all the minorities in Europe, they are the most vulnerable, despite efforts to improve their political lot: the German government has rigorously prosecuted individuals who have committed crimes against Gypsies; and Gypsy representatives from various national communities have formed all-European and World councils of Gypsies. Yet, despite these efforts, Europe’s Gypsies as a whole have few viable constitutional guarantees and other institutionalised protections against future dangers.

The most serious problem lies in demography. Gypsy fertility is the highest of all minorities in Europe; as already mentioned, they are the fastest growing minority on a xenophobic continent. Not only are Gypsy populations increasing in absolute terms but also in proportional terms. Thanks to decreasing and flat birth rates on the part of the majority populations, whether the precipitous fall among ethnic Russians or the steady decline of Czechs, Hungar-

ians and Germans, the percentage of the Gypsy minorities to the total population in each country is rising to levels many unfriendly observers and frightened politicians see as unacceptable. As the number of Gypsies proliferates, coupled with their structural refusal to assimilate, the Gypsy Question is on the agenda of more and more ethno-nationalist politicians and demagogues. Gypsies are fast becoming the classical "Other", the feared outsider, the alien in the midst of inhospitable ethnic majorities. All over Europe anti-Gypsyism is notably on the rise, both on the political as well as on the grass-roots level.

Though anti-Gypsyism is fuelled by recent events, the inflammatory vocabulary and antipathy toward Gypsies in Europe is fundamentally the same as it was for centuries prior to the *Porajmos*. Anti-Semitism in this contemporary European context is more symptomatic of a deeper cultural malaise, an animosity aimed much less at Jews than against all minorities; it is the call for a scapegoat. None is more qualified for this all-purpose role than the Gypsy in Europe.

European statesmen should be forewarned. The potentially genocidal danger to Gypsies can still be averted and contained through courageous statesmanship and imaginative public policy. The humanistic side of Europe needs to be marshalled before its darker side takes hold. The memory of Auschwitz should be made to alert all to the fact that if the danger to Jews could not be anticipated prior to Auschwitz, then, *after* Auschwitz, there is no excuse for ignoring a similar problem. This observation is not to draw an overly simplistic analogy equating anti-Semitism in Europe then with anti-Gypsyism now. The analysis is not to predict another round of genocide aimed at millions of Gypsies as it was once against Europe's Jews. It is to underscore a basic crisis in post-Cold War Europe that is a fundamental challenge to its status as a civilisation, a crisis, it seems, its leadership does not wish to face squarely.

Ironically, by 1989, just as the forces of European consolidation seemed certain, forces of disintegration again entered onto the stage. The rising forces of ethno-nationalism simultaneously threaten all minorities and, in turn, encourage all ethnic groups to seek haven in their respective ethno-nationalisms. The least capable of controlling their destinies in such circumstances are Gypsies. They have nowhere to go and little power to alter their existential condition from one as powerless objects of history to one as autonomous subjects. Whether they will ever become an *integral* strand of the fabric called Europe is the central question both for them and for all those who define themselves as humanistic Europeans. If anti-Semitism – the rejection of Jews – has survived Auschwitz, then there is little reason to be surprised by a persistent virulent anti-Gypsyism. In a very real sense, the answer to the question posed – "Why has anti-Semitism survived Auschwitz?" – lies at the heart of determining the character of the future Europe. Once again Europe stands at a crossroads. In which direction will it turn? Towards an old past or towards a new future?

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