CHAPTER 10

Neo-Jewishness and Allosemitism

The essential points we can now make as concluding assessments can be summarized as follows. Belgian Jewry, and with it, to one degree or another, the different Jewries of Western Europe, reveal today a Jewishness that was quite unknown in previous decades. By this we mean a Jewry grouping people who share different formulations of Jewishness, among whom the non-religious constitutes one of the prevailing ones. This Jewry, for its most, is not faithful to many traditions and rites inherited from the Jewish legacy but it still widely keeps to some of its markers—at least under a secular version. Despite the heterogeneity of their manners to be Jewish, these people still define themselves as "Jews" and, for many of them, do participate, in some ways, in the Jewish community. A community that, in contrast to expectations of some observers decades ago, currently displays exceptional dynamism and a capacity to set up educational structures, cultural institutions, political frameworks, media, museums, and many other concrete expressions of Jewishness.

This Jewish population sees as imperative to nurture the memory of the Shoah and provides Jewish education and knowledge to the young. That these efforts are not vain is shown by the data that we uncovered. To be sure, no few individuals choose to stand outside the community and to downplay their Jewish background. Though, such people were not reached by the survey and for these who were reached, it has appeared that they represent a Jewry strongly attached not only to Jewishness but also to Israel—indeedly of their eventual critiques of the latter’s policies.

That this kind of syndrome is not unique to Belgian Jews is shown by the all-European FRA survey and, to some extent, as confirmed by the recent Pew research in the US, by many American Jews. We might call this syndrome, following the present-day mode of terming new phenomena, “neo-Jewishness.” This notion—that implies, among other aspects, a wide liberty of selection of Jewish markers which do not prevent all-Jewish solidarity, and includes attachment to secular new values—especially the Memory of the Shoah and identification with Israel. This syndrome, like any form of Jewishness, requires sacrifices, however. We have seen in Belgium that it exposes Jews to harassment, attacks, even physical violence by antisemites who are today articulating on the public scene, a hatred of Jews, it too, under new forms—“neo-antisemitism” or “neo-judeophobia”. This hatred has not deleted the well-known visions of the past propagated at the time by churches and exploited by
nationalist and fascist demagogy. That antisemitism has by no means disappeared and as the world grows more and more removed from World War II and the shame and horrors of the Holocaust, it is being expressed more and more openly and frequently. Yet, in addition to this “classic” hatred of Jews, other powerful factors of antisemitism have sprung up with new carriers granting new meanings to the rejection of Jews.

At this point, it is to recall the analysis of Taguieff (2008) who points out to the new anti-Jewish wave growing from the media, political circles and assessments of intellectuals. In the background, there is the Arab-Muslim demonization of Israel that gets the floor on all possible international scene, articulated by a multiplicity of “specialized” organizations. The public weight of these forces hostile to Israel impact unavoidably on the public opinion, political parties and elites that lean, anyway, in the direction of the huge interests of the West in the Muslim part of the globe, incomparable to anything that Israel might offer in return for political backing or moral support.

What still sharpens the gravity of this reality for Jews and Israel is the demographic transformation, stemming from immigration, taking place in European countries. A large portion of this immigration originates from the Muslim world, and especially the Arab-Muslim countries. This new public identifies with the Palestinian cause by solidaristic reflex on the basis of religion and ethnicity and most often voices with power its unfriendly attitudes toward both Israel and local Jewish communities that are amalgamated with the Jewish state. It is under these anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish banners that Islam is gaining a new status in Europe: in many countries—and Belgium at their head—it is now the second national religion. In more than one European state, Jews are encouraged—more or less tacitly—to avoid emphasizing their Jewishness in public.

On the Belgian scene, we have seen, this new population possesses an electoral weight overtaking by far that of the Jews (there are about 40,000 Jews in Belgium, but around 500,000 Muslims).

Moreover, it is also to observe that large segments of Europe's Muslim population—and this is the case of Belgium's—experience precarious socioeconomic conditions while the Jews appear in the eyes of many a recent immigrant from Morocco or Algeria as a well-to-do community. This fact encourages extremists to channel immigrants' discontent under the banner of anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli slogans. The more so the case, that Jews remain a distinct part of the “prosperous” that, because of its relative social distinctiveness, can be attacked without entailing an overall class clash between the “rich” and the “poor”. These are the ideal conditions for making the Jew a perfect scapegoat: it is a community associated with Israel, the worst of all enemies; it is