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FONDAZIONE GIUSEPPE LEVI PELLONI Centro Nazionale Ricerche Storiche

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BUILDING COALITION FOR TOLERANCE

Training course for staff

“Intercultural education, combating intolerance and antisemitism”

increasing awareness and skills for contemporary challenges

Staff mobility

Contract number 2025-1-PL01-KA122-ADU-000311858

The Mutations of Hate: Antisemitism

From the historical roots of anti-Judaism
to contemporary resurgences.

The Definition

According to the Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, antisemitism is «the aversion and struggle against Jews and, more generally, against everything Jewish.»

The Origin of the Term

1879

Coined for the first time by the German nationalist Wilhelm Marr. Although the term is modern, it crystallizes a millenarian prejudice that has changed form over the centuries.

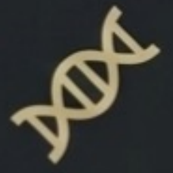
The Three Roots of Prejudice

Religious (Antijudaism)

- **Era:** Early centuries of Christianity.
- **The False Myth:** Unfounded and instrumental accusation of "Deicide" (responsibility for the death of Jesus).
- **Development:** Intensified by the Lateran Councils, creating a systematic climate of hostility.

Cultural and Socio-Economic

- **Era:** Middle Ages.
- **The False Myth:** Accusations of elitism (bloodline) and corporatism.
- **The Reality:** Life in separate neighborhoods was not a desire for segregation, but an imposition of law.



Racial

- **Era:** From the 19th century onwards.
- **The False Myth:** Hatred detaches from religion and becomes biological and nationalist.
- **Development:** It affects the individual regardless of any religious conversion.

The Socio-Economic Paradox (Middle Ages)

How a legal imposition was transformed into a weapon of hatred.

1. The Christian Ban

Medieval Christian law forbade its followers from practicing lending at interest, considering it usury.

2. The Professional Imposition

Jewish communities were forced into credit activities, which became one of the very few professions accessible to them.

3. The False Accusation

Jews were unjustly accused of enriching themselves at the expense of Christians, transforming an economic constraint into a pretext to intensify hostility.

The Nineteenth Century and the State Dimension

Social tensions and nationalisms transform hatred into a tool of mass politics.

Eastern Europe: Violence

- **Areas:** Russia, Poland, Balkan Peninsula.
- **Phenomenon:** Pogroms. Clamorous episodes of physical violence, bloody persecutions, and destruction of communities, often tolerated or encouraged by the authorities.

Western Europe: The Political Escamotage

- **Area:** France.
- **Phenomenon:** The Dreyfus Affair. The Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus was accused of treason on false grounds: a case of state antisemitism used as a political escamotage to attempt to overthrow the Third Republic.

The Construction of the Nazi Lie

The Documentary Forgery

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: a text describing an alleged Jewish plan for world domination, already definitively debunked as a forgery in 1921.

The Ideological Instrumentalization

Adolf Hitler uses his book Mein Kampf to blame a non-existent international Jewish capitalist conspiracy for Germany's defeat in World War I.

The Political Goal

Antisemitism becomes a functional diversion from the class struggle and a unifying element for National Socialist rule.

The Point of No Return: The Holocaust

1935: The Exclusion

Promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws. Jews are legally removed from public life and subjected to systematic persecution.

Second World War: The Rationalization of Hate

The transition from discrimination to a plan of extermination coldly and rationally implemented.

The Abyss: The Extermination Camps

The implementation of the genocide (Holocaust) perpetrated by Nazi Germany in places such as Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Belsen.

The Anatomy of State Hatred: Germany vs. Italy

Nazi Germany

- **Matrix**: Racial and biological.
- **Target**: The Jewish race in its entirety, seen as a global genetic threat.

Fascist Italy

- **Official Start**: July 14, 1938, with the publication of the Manifesto of Race.
- **Matrix**: Strongly religious and spiritual component.
- **Target**: Tended to discriminate mainly against non-converted Jews.
- **Ambiguity**: Mussolini initially stated that Jews with indisputable military and civil merits would find understanding.

Shared Outcome: Despite theoretical differences, the 1938 racial laws represented a tragic point of no return, paving the way for total discrimination and persecution in Italy as a whole.

The Contemporary Resurgence (2025)

The birth of the State of Israel (1948) has generated a broad anti-Zionist movement that today dangerously intertwines with ancient anti-Jewish sentiments, reviving old stereotypes.

The Catalyst Element

The Catalyst: The intensification of the conflict in Gaza has sparked a worrying global resurgence of antisemitism.

Lyon (February 2025)

Multiplication of acts of vandalism against Jewish businesses, synagogues, and cemeteries.

Paris and Berlin (Spring 2025)

Serious tensions on university campuses, where Jewish students have been the target of targeted intimidation.

The Church's Turning Point: Uprooting the Origins

The revision of Catholicism's ancient attitude, initiated before the Second Vatican Council.

1965: Nostra Aetate Declaration

The Action: The Catholic Church formally condemns all forms of anti-Judaism.
The Significance: Official recognition of the Jewish roots of Christianity. Definitive end to the accusation of collective responsibility of the Jews for the death of Jesus.

1974 - 1985: Consolidation

Subsequent Vatican documents apply and reinforce the conciliar principles.

1986: The Encounter

The historic visit of Pope John Paul II to the Synagogue of Rome, sealing the new course.

The Modern Framework: The IHRA Definition

Officially adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic on January 17, 2020.

> "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

- Targets the psychological intent even before the physical action.
- Recognizes that antisemitism is a virus that strikes anyone associated, even falsely, with Judaism.
- Provides a clear legal basis to prosecute acts like the vandalism in Lyon or the intimidation on campuses.

FINAL SYNTHESIS

The Tree of Prejudice: A Constant Vigilance

The Branches (Modern Manifestations)

Extreme Anti-Zionism, vandalism, and contemporary intimidation (2025).

The Trunk (The Historical Structure)

State Racial Antisemitism (The Dreyfus Affair, Racial Laws, The Nazi Lie and the Shoah).

The Roots (The Hidden Past)

Ancient religious Anti-Judaism (Accusation of Deicide) and medieval socio-economic prejudices (Myth of Usury).

Takeaway: Antisemitism is not a static event confined to history books, but a phenomenon that changes form to adapt to new eras. Understanding its complex historicity is the first, indispensable tool to unmask and neutralize its contemporary recurrences.