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**Russian Antisemitism in a
European Perspective**

The Beilis Affair and Its Treatment in
the French Press

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ABSTRACT

Il presente studio intende analizzare il fenomeno dell'antisemitismo nella Russia prerivoluzionaria in una prospettiva europea. A tal fine viene preso come caso di studio un processo avvenuto nel 1913 a Kiev riguardante un cittadino ebreo, Mendel Beilis, accusato di omicidio rituale. Oltre al fatto in sé, vengono esaminati articoli di varie testate giornalistiche francesi dell'epoca a riguardo, in modo da inserire l'accusa di omicidio rituale nel contesto europeo.

Il punto di partenza di questo studio è l'analisi di Cesare G. De Michelis, che sottolinea come i concetti che sono generalmente utilizzati per studiare il fenomeno dell'antisemitismo in Europa occidentale non siano adatte al contesto culturale russo. In particolare, in Russia la componente razziale sarebbe rimasta marginale a favore della componente religiosa. La categoria dominante è quindi quella della giudeofobia, che indica l'esito relativamente recente dell'evoluzione dell'antigiudaismo religioso.¹

Il termine "antisemitismo" fu utilizzato per la prima volta dal pubblicista tedesco Wilhelm Marr nel 1879, e fu proprio in quegli anni che si verificò in Russia la prima ondata di pogrom, identificati da vari studiosi come distinguibili rispetto agli episodi di violenza antiebraica antecedenti poiché non si basavano più soltanto su motivi religiosi, ma riguardavano invece problematiche relative ai cambiamenti socioeconomici che la popolazione locale stava affrontando all'epoca.

Fu proprio in Russia, inoltre, che all'inizio del '900 vennero pubblicati i *Protocolli dei savi di Sion*, un testo destinato ad essere la base di buona parte della propaganda antisemita fino al giorno d'oggi. Questo falso, inoltre, rappresenta un punto di contatto tra la tradizione giudeofobica russa e l'ideologia antisemita in generale. Elementi provenienti da uno specifico contesto russo parteciparono quindi alla formazione del mito di una cospirazione ebraico-massonica.

Per comprendere le ragioni che portarono alle tre ondate di pogrom che si verificarono tra la fine del diciannovesimo e l'inizio del ventesimo secolo, il primo capitolo traccia la storia della questione ebraica nella Russia imperiale. La popolazione ebraica in Russia rimase

¹ Cesare G. De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia: dal libro del "kabal" ai protocolli dei savi di Sion*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2001, pp. 15-18.

relativamente marginale fino al regno di Caterina II, con l'annessione di territori della Confederazione polacco-lituana. Fu questo fatto storico a determinare l'acquisizione di un'area geografica in cui la presenza ebraica era consistente e dove essa giocava un ruolo fondamentale nel tessuto economico e sociale della popolazione locale. Da quel periodo fino alla rivoluzione del 1917, agli ebrei russi venne conferito uno status giuridico diverso rispetto a quello degli altri cittadini, sia per quanto riguarda i diritti civili che per lo spostamento in altre aree geografiche dell'Impero.

Fin dai primi anni, infatti, agli ebrei venne imposto il divieto di lasciare la cosiddetta Zona di residenza, un'area geografica che comprendeva parte delle odierne Polonia, Bielorussia, Lituania, Ucraina e la regione storica della Bessarabia. Nel corso del diciannovesimo secolo, l'approccio delle autorità nei confronti di questa popolazione non fu uniforme, ma variò gradualmente. Inizialmente prevalse una linea che mirava all'integrazione delle comunità ebraiche tramite il riconoscimento temporaneo di un sistema di auto-amministrazione che vigeva ancora prima dell'annessione, il *kahal*.

Con il regno di Nicola I, tuttavia, prevalse una linea volta all'assimilazione: i *kahal* vennero aboliti e venne ufficialmente introdotta una legislazione che demarcava i confini della Zona di residenza. Il governo tentò inoltre di promuovere una rete di scuole ebraiche in russo; un altro provvedimento importante fu l'introduzione della leva militare obbligatoria, vista come un mezzo per favorire l'assimilazione linguistica. Inizialmente, inoltre, agli ebrei non era consentito l'accesso ai gradi più alti dell'esercito senza la conversione al cristianesimo. A partire dalla seconda metà del diciannovesimo secolo, vennero adottate misure volte ad abolire progressivamente il divieto di abbandono della zona di residenza, anche se ciò si limitò solamente ai ceti più abbienti.

Nel corso di questo periodo, la crescita demografica della popolazione ebraica nei territori della Zona di residenza fu notevole, incrementandone l'importanza economica e sociale in quell'area dell'Impero. I cambiamenti intrapresi durante l'età delle cosiddette grandi riforme durante il regno di Alessandro II, inoltre, riconfigurarono notevolmente i rapporti tra le comunità e le classi sociali.

Fu in questo clima che, in seguito all'assassinio dello "zar riformatore", si verificò la prima ondata di pogrom. Sebbene gli episodi di violenza antiebraica non fossero nuovi, con questo termine si intendono attacchi che non furono solamente motivati dall'intolleranza religiosa.

Gli storici fanno riferimento a tre ondate di pogrom: la prima fu quella del 1881, la seconda avvenne nel 1905 e la terza nel corso della guerra civile russa in seguito alla rivoluzione bolscevica. Tutti e tre questi episodi avvennero in concomitanza con importanti avvenimenti storici. Fu proprio a partire dalla fine del diciannovesimo secolo che la violenza nei confronti della popolazione ebraica iniziò a dipendere da fattori non più religiosi, ma socioeconomici.

In questo periodo, i *Protocolli dei Savi di Sion* vennero pubblicati per la prima volta sul quotidiano russo *Znamja* nel 1903. Proprio in quanto falso storico, le loro origini rimangono ancora oggi incerte. La ricerca ha però individuato nella genesi di questo documento un corpus di materiali appartenenti sia a un contesto europeo, come il *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu* di Maurice Joly, sia pubblicazioni russe, tra cui in particolare il *Libro del Kabal* di Jacob Brafman risalente al 1869.

Il successo dei *Protocolli* determinò l'affermazione del mito di una cospirazione ebraica mondiale. Perciò, a questo contribuirono anche elementi direttamente attribuibili alla storia russa. Il secondo capitolo si concentra quindi sulle componenti distintive dell'antisemitismo russo e contemporaneamente sugli aspetti che permettono di collocarlo in un contesto europeo. A questo scopo, viene preso come modello comparativo di riferimento la storia dell'affermazione dell'antisemitismo come ideologia politica in Francia, seguendo l'analisi fornita da Zeev Sternhell² e da Michele Battini.³ In seguito, vengono delineate le caratteristiche dell'antisemitismo russo riconducibili alla dominante giudeofobica riconosciuta da De Michelis e i fattori politici che permettono di accostarlo alla vicenda francese.

L'affermazione del Boulangismo in Francia come movimento politico di massa determinò l'ascesa dell'antisemitismo come componente dell'ideologia politica. Inizialmente, tuttavia, esso non era un elemento esclusivo del pensiero di destra. Tra i fattori che determinarono l'affermazione politica dell'antisemitismo si possono riconoscere sia l'idea di un'élite finanziaria ebraica che esercita il controllo sull'economia capitalista (antisemitismo economico), sia, in particolare, una componente razziale derivante dall'affermazione del darwinismo sociale. Contemporaneamente, l'antisemitismo era una vera e propria ideologia politica in quanto corollario dell'affermazione del nazionalismo boulangista: la presenza

² Zeev Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914 : les origines françaises du fascisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997.

³ Michele Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli: propaganda, falsificazione, persecuzione degli ebrei*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2010.

ebraica, in questo senso, veniva vista come un elemento che comprometteva l'unità nazionale. Un altro elemento distintivo del fenomeno in Francia era la quasi totale assenza della componente religiosa antiggiudaica, come sottolineato dallo stesso Édouard Drumont, uno dei principali teorici dell'antisemitismo.

L'Affaire Dreyfus in Francia determinò una riconfigurazione del panorama politico nei confronti dell'antisemitismo. Questo fatto storico contribuì all'affermazione della componente irrazionale del fenomeno, e allo stesso tempo fu proprio in questa occasione che la quasi totalità dei partiti appartenenti all'area socialista rifiutarono l'antisemitismo in quanto elemento che si poneva in contrasto coi valori della Repubblica. A sinistra, esso sopravvisse nell'area più radicale nella componente economica. In seguito a questo mutamento di prospettiva, negli anni precedenti allo scoppio della Prima guerra mondiale, le accuse mosse nei confronti degli ebrei divennero un aspetto quasi esclusivo dell'ideologia corporativa della destra nazionalista.

L'affermazione dell'antisemitismo nella Russia prerivoluzionaria partiva da presupposti completamente diversi rispetto alla situazione in Francia, dove gli ebrei avevano ottenuto pari diritti civili già nel 1791, alla luce dei valori della Dichiarazione dei diritti dell'uomo e del cittadino. Benché la componente religiosa della giudeofobia in Russia fosse dominante, e nonostante quella razziale fosse in generale irrilevante rispetto al contesto francese, già lo slavofilismo condannava gli ebrei identificandoli con i concetti di cosmopolitismo e di modernità liberale che avrebbe compromesso l'integrità nazionale. Questi fattori entrarono poi a far parte dell'ideologia dei movimenti di destra nazionalista così come l'idea del complotto, soprattutto con la rivoluzione del 1905.

Il secondo capitolo si concentra sul mito dell'omicidio rituale come elemento di contatto tra l'antisemitismo russo e quello europeo. Sebbene le origini di questa accusa siano antiche e in buona parte assimilabili all'antigiudaismo cattolico, nel corso del diciannovesimo secolo essa riapparve con elementi propri dell'antisemitismo moderno, tra cui in particolare l'idea del complotto ebraico. Fu solamente in questo periodo, in seguito all'annessione dei territori in cui sarebbe stata stabilita la Zona di residenza, che il mito apparve in Russia. Nonostante questo esito relativamente recente, qui ebbe maggiore successo nella propaganda antisemita tra la fine del diciannovesimo e l'inizio del ventesimo secolo proprio per la maggiore rilevanza della simbologia religiosa in questo contesto. In particolare, in Francia questo mito rimase marginale, e lo stesso Drumont lo reinterpretò in chiave razzista.

Alla luce di queste considerazioni, il secondo capitolo si focalizza infine sull'affare Beilis, riguardante il processo a Kiev del 1913 di un ebreo accusato di omicidio rituale. Questo caso ebbe molta risonanza nell'opinione pubblica anche all'estero. La vicenda viene ricostruita partendo dall'azione di gruppi nazionalisti nella formulazione dell'accusa, fino al coinvolgimento di alcuni membri del governo nella causa. Verrà poi affrontato il modo in cui il mito venne riadattato in funzione dello svolgimento del processo.

Nel corso del terzo capitolo, lo studio si concentra sull'analisi di articoli di testate giornalistiche francesi su questo caso, permettendo di collocare la vicenda in una prospettiva europea. In molti casi in Europa l'affare Beilis venne rappresentato come un fatto che svelava la corruzione del governo russo. In Francia, in generale, nella stampa moderata ciò non avvenne per l'Alleanza franco-russa di quel periodo. Partendo da questo presupposto, vengono esaminati articoli tratti sia da giornali politici di aree diverse, sia dalla stampa di diffusione di massa. Già all'epoca il caso era stato ridenominato *affaire*: proprio per la sua importanza politica, lo studio degli articoli di testate apertamente nazionaliste e antisemite permette di capire come esse rappresentassero l'accusa di omicidio rituale e il modo in cui il caso venne letto in chiave cospirativa pochi anni dopo l'Affaire Dreyfus. Allo stesso modo, la rappresentazione del fatto da parte della stampa socialista mette in luce la riconfigurazione di quell'area politica nei confronti della questione ebraica pochi anni dopo il caso francese, così come le posizioni di aperta condanna nei confronti del governo russo. Infine, gli articoli tratti dai giornali di diffusione di massa permettono di constatare la possibile assenza di lettura del processo in chiave politica e la rilevanza data al solo fatto di cronaca.

INTRODUCTION

The end of what has been identified as the long nineteenth century coincided with the affirmation of modern antisemitism in Europe. The term “antisemitism” itself was formulated for the first time in 1879 by German publicist Wilhelm Marr. It was in those years that in the Russian Empire the first wave of pogroms occurred. While anti-Jewish violence was not new, this new escalation could not be explained in terms of mere religious hatred anymore but was mainly related to major socioeconomical changes that the local population was facing at that time.

The aim of this work is indeed to show how Russian antisemitism can be contextualized in a broader European context behind historical and cultural differences. The starting point is the analysis provided by Cesare G. De Michelis, who considers the categories that have generally been used to describe European antisemitism as less suitable to the same phenomenon in Russia, where Judeophobia remained the main component of anti-Jewish hatred and prejudices. This last term refers to the radicalization of traditional religious anti-Judaism that verified during the nineteenth century.⁴

Nevertheless, Russia is the country where the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were first published at the beginning of the twentieth century. This document played a fundamental role in the history of antisemitism as a political ideology, and its wide divulgation lasted up to the present day. Research found how it was the result of a collection of texts and theories ascribable both to the specific Russian context and to a wider European phenomenon.

In order to identify the elements of Russian antisemitism that can be ascribable to a European perspective, this thesis will analyze a judicial case concerning a Russian Jew, Mendel Beilis, accused of killing a Christian child for ritual purposes in 1911. The trial, that took place in Kiev in 1913, had wide resonance in the public opinion outside Russia. It happened few years after the Dreyfus Affair, an historical fact that determined the affirmation of antisemitism as a political ideology in France.

The trial of Mendel Beilis for an accusation of ritual murder shows how Russian antisemitism relied on religious symbology and mysticism. At the same time, however, the history of the

⁴ Cesare G. De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia: dal libro del “kabal” ai protocolli dei savi di Sion*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2001, pp. 15-18.

myth of blood libel Europe shows how this accusation, whose origins date back to ancient times, over the nineteenth century was reconfigured with new characteristics that allow its contextualization as an element of modern antisemitism.

Before examining the blood libel accusation, the first chapter will analyze the historical background of the Jewish question in Imperial Russia that brought to the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The premises of the affirmation of modern antisemitism in Russia were indeed consistently different than in other countries. While in France, for example, Jews were granted with equal civil rights since 1791, in Russia they lived in a restrictive juridical status. Jewish presence in the Russian Empire was quite marginal until the end of the eighteenth century; the annexation of Polish-Lithuanian territories determined the acquisition of a consistent population. Since then, Jews were generally prevented to reside outside the Pale of Settlement, a specific area west of the Empire corresponding to those recently annexed territories.

Alessandro Cifariello examined how the legal framework concerning Russian Jews was not constant, but it evolved all over the nineteenth century.⁵ Concepts of integration and assimilation are useful to understand the change of attitude by the central government towards the Jewish question. During the first decades after the annexation, indeed, the *kahal*, a mechanism of self-administration adopted by the Jewish communities living in the Pale before being part of the Empire, was preserved by the authorities in order to facilitate the integration. Since the reign of tsar Nicholas II, however, the government approach changed, dismantling the institutions that granted the autonomy of the Jewish population.

The study of the legal status of Russian Jews allows a contextualization of the outbreak of pogroms since the first wave in 1881. Research showed that the authorities were not involved in these episodes of violence. At the same time, however, pogroms revealed that the mere assimilation of the Jews was not possible anymore and facilitated the development of national identity among them. These episodes also indicated how the perception of the Jewish question by Russian public opinion had radically changed since the beginning of the century, when it was quite marginal: the Jewish question had assumed a political importance that went beyond the religious sphere.

⁵ Alessandro Cifariello, *Ebrei e "zona di residenza" durante il regno di Alessandro II*, in "Studi Slavistici", 2010, VII, pp. 85-109.

The second chapter will consider the distinctive features of Russian antisemitism while also analyzing it in a European perspective. The history of the blood libel will be examined not only to understand the Beilis Affair, but also because it shows the importance of the religious component in the Russian context. It also represents a point of connection with the European tradition.

In order to analyze Russian antisemitism in a European perspective, the second chapter will take the French case as a comparative model. First, the rise of modern antisemitism in France between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century will be examined in order to show the peculiarities but also the elements that can be found in the two different countries. The analysis provided by Zeev Sternhell⁶ and Michele Battini⁷ allows to understand how in France modern antisemitism derived from both the economic downturn of that period and from the affirmation of mass politics. In the French case, the Dreyfus Affair constituted a turning point because it determined the official affirmation of antisemitism in the political propaganda. Besides, since then left-wing political movements rejected antisemitic ideology, which became a decisive component of nationalism.

Heinz-Dietrich Löwe considers the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a publication that gave voice to the fears of Russian conservatives.⁸ Russian antisemitism will therefore be analyzed considering the importance of the Judeophobic component but also highlighting its importance in delineating the myth of a Jewish world conspiracy and in recognizing in the Jewish population an element that could compromise national unity. The perception of Jews as the embodiment of cosmopolitanism and modernity will be studied considering the link with the same phenomenon in France.

The trial of Mendel Beilis shows the importance of religious symbolism in the Russian context, where the racial component of antisemitism did not play a major role as in France. Yet the myth of blood libel will be analyzed considering its reappearance during the nineteenth century and its reconfiguration as an element of modern antisemitism. It also represents a point of conjunction between the Roman Catholic and the Russian Orthodox traditions, since it appeared in Eastern Europe only in modern times.

⁶ Zeev Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914 : les origines françaises du fascisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997.

⁷ Michele Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli: propaganda, falsificazione, persecuzione degli ebrei*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2010.

⁸ Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, "Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union", in: Albert S. Lindemann, Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism: A History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 175.

In the light of the history of the ritual murder accusation as an element deriving from the anti-Judaic tradition and incorporated by antisemitism, the second chapter will focus on the Beilis Affair in Kiev and its treatment in the French press. Albert S. Lindemann analyzed the case and its implications including it in the history of the rise of modern antisemitism at the turn of the century.⁹ This work will be the starting point of the analysis of the trial and the prosecution underlining the role played by members of the government in framing them and the political relevance of the affair in Russia.

The third chapter will finally analyze the treatment of the case in the French Press. Back in 1963, examining the impact of the Beilis affair on European public opinion, Zosa Szajkowski asserted that in France the narration of the trial in Kiev by the press, with the exception of left-wing political newspapers, was overall neutral without any criticism to the Russian government, due to the Franco-Russian Entente.¹⁰ Reports of the case by two different international Jewish organizations, the American Jewish Committee and the Paris-based Alliance Israélite Universelle will be taken first into consideration in order to understand how the concern of Jewish advocacy groups contributed to arise the interest of foreign press on the case. Starting from this considerations, articles concerning the affair by several publications will be studied, focusing first on the narration by the political press: considering the description of the events by nationalist and openly antisemitic newspapers allows a contextualization of the myth of blood libel in France, where the religious component of antisemitism was not as relevant as it was in Russia. Beyond that, the analysis of the case treated by socialist newspapers shows how French left-wing movements reconfigured their position toward the Jewish question after the Dreyfus affair and highlights their accusations to the Russian government. Finally, the reception of the trial by mass-circulation newspapers will be analyzed considering their position over the political implications of the affair.

⁹ Albert S. Lindemann, *The Jew Accused: Three Antisemitic Affairs (Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank), 1894-1915*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

¹⁰ Zosa Szajkowski, *The Impact of the Beilis Case on Central and Western Europe*, in "Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research", 1963, 31, pp. 197-218.

CHAPTER 1

The Jewish Question in Imperial Russia

The Jewish question gained relevance in Imperial Russia only after the annexation of Poland between 1772 and 1795. Before that, Jewish presence in the Empire was quite marginal, while at the turn of the century it comprised half of the world Jewish population. A century later, in a general census held in 1897, Jews constituted the fifth largest ethnical group under Russian rule, the largest non-Slavic.¹¹

In the course of a century, the presence of Jews and their legal status became fundamental in the political debate. Beyond the political sphere, however, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of what De Michelis defines as “antisemitic subculture”¹²: while the status of Jews regarding the provisions and limitations to which they were subjected could change after their conversion, in the public debate and in the Russian culture the situation was different. The outbreak of anti-Jewish violence in the 1881-1884 wave of pogroms, among other episodes, and the causes beyond it that research identified show how the Jewish question was not only limited to a problem of integration, but it was strictly related to the growing fears towards modernity as a consequence of the socioeconomic changes that were verifying in those years.

The First Juridical Provisions Towards Russian Jews

Over the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century the Russian Empire started expanding westward, starting from the annexation of Ukraine from Poland in 1667 that determined the acquisition of a consistent Jewish community. Russian legislation, however, started contemplating the status of the Jewish population only after the annexation of Eastern Poland that took place between 1772 and 1795 under Catherine II.¹³ Since the sixteenth century, indeed, Jews were not admitted in Russian territories.¹⁴

The existence of an area of the Empire where Jews were concentrated and the imposition of a special jurisdiction aimed at their assimilation dates to the reign of Elizaveta Petrovna,

¹¹ Cifariello, *Ebrei e “zona di residenza” durante il regno di Alessandro II*, p. 87.

¹² De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, pp. 15-16.

¹³ Benjamin Nathans, “Jews”, in: D. Lieven, *The Cambridge History of Russia, vol. 2: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 186.

¹⁴ Léon Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo, vol. IV: l'Europa suicida, 1870-1933*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1990, p. 80.

when Ukraine and the Baltic States were annexed.¹⁵ However, the first attempt of creating a special jurisdiction for Russian Jews was under Catherine II.¹⁶

Under Polish rule, the autonomy of the Jewish community was allowed by a system of self-administration, the *kahal*, which had already been recognized by Polish authorities back in 1551.¹⁷ The *kahal* guaranteed to the Jewish population under Polish-Lithuanian rule an unprecedented level of autonomy: in each community, this entity monitored the local population and the collection of tributes. At a national level, the Community of the Four Lands coordinated these Jewish communities and represented them.¹⁸

The expansion of the Russian Empire westward was gradual: at the end of the nineteenth century, it comprised larger portions of territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Confederation, and this determined the presence of a more consistent Jewish population. Consequently, the response of the central government to the issue of the juridical status of the recently acquired Jewish citizens was not unique, and it was developed in different phases.¹⁹

The Jewish question was a relevant political matter over all the reign of Catherine II. During the first days after her accession to the throne, the proposal of Peter III to allow the establishment of members of the Jewish population in the Empire was one of the priorities of the political agenda. The empress decided to delay the acquisition of Jewish citizens by explicitly excluding them in a 1762 political manifesto where she invited foreign citizens to settle in the Russian Empire. It was in those years, however, that Catherine II started to consider a future Jewish settlement as an opportunity to reinforce the *Tiers État* and to colonize the unoccupied territories of the *Novorossija* (the recently acquired areas of the Russian Empire on the Black Sea). Already in 1769, the settlement in this area was explicitly authorized for the first time.²⁰

Despite this first *ukaz* allowing a Jewish settlement, the question became more complex and politically relevant during the first part of the expansion westward, when the Russian Empire

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 82.

¹⁶ Léon Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo, vol. III: da Voltaire a Wagner*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1976, p. 288.

¹⁷ Alessandro Cifariello, *L'ombra del kahal. Immaginario antisemita nella Russia dell'Ottocento*, Roma, Viella, 2013, pp. 15-17.

¹⁸ Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale. The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p. 25.

¹⁹ Cifariello, *L'ombra del kahal*, pp. 15-17.

²⁰ Isabel de Madariaga, *Caterina di Russia*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi editore, 1988, pp. 685-686.

annexed Belorussian territories from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After this first annexation in 1772, the central government guaranteed to the Jewish population freedom of religion and private property, thus granting the continuity of the *kahal* system, since all Jewish citizens were obliged to enroll to it. John D. Klier emphasizes the vagueness of the legislation on the status of Jewish citizens that was introduced over this period. First, the community was considered as a unique entity and a distinct category from the rest of the population. The only factor identifying a member of this community was religion, particularly in the first years after the annexation. According to the author, this caused an inadequate approach of the Russian central government towards the Jewish population, which would have been at the base of the future legislation. Indeed, over the first years after the 1772 acquisition of Polish-Lithuanian territories, the provisions were extremely vague. In that period Russian officials maintained the pre-existent status quo, thus granting freedom of religion and property rights, and accepting the pre-existent mechanism of self-administration. However, the *kahal* was not mentioned in those first provisions: in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Jewish population was not only considered as a religious group, but also as a corporation, with its own legal status and administration. Since 1772, the Russian Empire acquired a consistent number of Jewish subjects with their own legal status, but without understanding the mechanisms behind it: this fact determined the future ambiguous legal status of Russian Jews. The first attitude of the central government towards this population was thus characterized by a strengthening of the *kahal* system.²¹

Right after this first annexation, Catherine II confirmed to the recently acquired Jewish population the rights that they enjoyed under Polish rule, such as freedom of religion and the right to private property. Löwe defines this first attitude as corresponding to the principles of enlightened absolutism characterizing in those years the policies of the empress.²² However, the consideration of the central government towards the autonomous *kahal* system showed the first discrepancies: on one hand it was seen as a way to carry out those administrative functions that the central bureaucratic system was not able to control because of the recent acquisition and the specificity of the population; on the other, the

²¹ John D. Klier, *The Ambiguous Legal Status of Russian Jewry in the Reign of Catherine II*, in "Slavic Review", 1976, vol. 35, n. 3, pp. 506-507.

²² Löwe, "Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union", p. 167.

imperial authorities felt the need of an end of the Jewish separatism.²³ Assimilation started to be considered as the only way to solve the Jewish question.

Thus, over the first decade, Russian authorities inherited the previous legal system, identifying the Jewish population as an autonomous entity with its own legal and administrative status. The situation gradually changed during the year 1780 when Jewish citizens could register among the urban estates as *meshchane* (artisans and petty traders) or *купцы* (merchants), thus allowing them to abandon the rural areas. This fact was also fostered by a 1783 decree imposing on the Jewish citizens the same taxation as the other citizens. Finally, in 1786, the equal status of Russian Jews was proclaimed by a specific *указ*. This decision had direct effects over the *Kahal* system, which, besides its religious purposes, would have continued only to grant the collection of taxes. With this historical background, Isabel de Madariaga shows how these reforms had a second aim that consisted in the restriction of the freedom of movement of the Jewish urban population (among other urban estates).²⁴ According to Benjamin Nathans, over this period the central government was promoting the growth of the urban population, and this also involved the Jewish community.²⁵

The political approach of Catherine II towards the Jewish question particularly changed over the following decade: in 1794, an imperial decree doubled the tax burden compared to the rest of the population. It is not clear what are the reasons behind this shift in the political consideration of the Jewish community, whether it was an attempt to counter-balance the exemption of the Jewish subjects from the military service or a measure aimed at fostering the move of the population to the southern regions of the empire, mainly Ukraine, where they could benefit from a fiscal immunity for a certain period after their settlement. The different approach by the central government could also be interpreted as a result of the growing fears of Catherine II towards “enlightened” reforms and tolerance after the French Revolution.²⁶

According to Klier, the years 1780s represented an attempt to promote the economic integration of the Jewish population through the access to urban social estates. Beyond this approach, since this first period the legal status of Russian Jewry was characterized by a restricted area where their settlement was allowed. The following decade, however,

²³ De Madariaga, *Caterina di Russia*, p. 688.

²⁴ Ivi, pp. 688-690.

²⁵ Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, Berkeley, p. 26.

²⁶ De Madariaga, *Caterina di Russia*, p. 691.

represented the end of this first assimilationist approach in favor of a discriminatory legal status of the population. This new approach, i.e. territorial restrictions and more onerous fiscal obligations can be considered the base of the Pale of Settlement.²⁷ Löwe partially reaffirms this interpretation: right after the annexation and during the reign of Catherine II, the *kahal* system of self-administration became prominent; the recently acquired Jewish population, however, found resistance from the local population towards their affairs. In this sense, according to the author, the 1783 decree corresponded to the necessity of protecting their economic rights.²⁸

At the end of the eighteenth century, half of the total Jewish population in the world lived in the Russian Empire: this factor, together with the political efforts of the central government aimed at eradicating the presence of this population in the countryside by concentrating it in the urban areas, characterized the first restrictive policies.²⁹

Even if the *kahal* was only supposed to function as a system that could grant the collection of tributes and rule the religious life, indeed, over the last period of the reign of Catherine II, restrictions were gradually imposed on the Jewish population, particularly after the annexation of bigger portions of territories; starting from the ban to enroll to social estates outside the Belorussian territories introduced in 1791, these new provisions determined a shift in the legal status of Russian Jewry that in the following years introduced the Pale of Settlement.³⁰

The Institution of the Pale of Settlement

As it can be noticed considering the reign of Catherine II, the approach of the central government towards the Jewish question changed in the last decade of the eighteenth century; some historians see this change coinciding with the growing fears of the European autocracies after the French Revolution.³¹ This shift was reflected in the provisions that were taken in the following years by the successors of the Empress, and that lead to the creation of the Pale of Settlement.

Under Paul II, the poet Gavril Derzhavin obtained the mandate to publish an enquiry on the social and economic role of the Jewish population, where he stressed on the importance of

²⁷ Klier, *The Ambiguous Legal Status of Russian Jewry in the Reign of Catherine II*, p. 517.

²⁸ Löwe, "Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union", p. 167.

²⁹ Riccardo Calimani, *Passione e tragedia. La storia degli ebrei russi*, Milano, Mondadori, 2006, p. 8.

³⁰ Cifariello, *L'ombra del kahal*, pp. 18-19.

³¹ De Madariaga, *Caterina di Russia*, p. 691.

the emancipation as a way of promoting the moral transformation of the Jewish population and considered the *Kahal* as an obstacle to it, since he described this system as a “State within the State”. This report was influenced by the German example, that promoted the emancipation of Jews through integration: the ideas and the example of Mendelssohn had a crucial role in this process. Under the reign of tsar Alexander I, Minister Speransky proposed the idea that the integration of the Russian Jewry was not possible with the use of force, but only promoting their social and economic emancipation.³²

Russian central government tried to promote emancipation through the access to urban estates. According to Nathans, however, the fiscal system was more relevant to the Jewish population than the access to the estates, since it ruled other aspects of the status quo of this minority such as military service and restrictions on travel. After the acquisition of Polish territories and over the first decades of the nineteenth century, indeed the so-called Jewish question remained rather peripheral, since the *kahal* system was still the main factor ruling the life of the Jewish population.³³

While the reign of Alexander I was characterized by a “liberal” approach aimed at the integration of the Jewish community through their emancipation, his successor implemented radically different policies aimed at forcing the assimilation through several provisions, starting from the dismantling of the *kahal* as a system of self-administration.³⁴

The accession to the throne of tsar Nicholas I, indeed, determined a shift in the perspective of the jurisdiction concerning the Jewish community. The new emperor abandoned the idea of conferring autonomy to the recently acquired subjects through a mechanism of self-administration such as the *kahal* adopting a political approach aimed at their assimilation.³⁵

The Pale of Settlement (*Cherta postoyannoy osledosti*), was an area of the Russian Empire created between the end of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century after the annexation of Eastern Poland, where Russian Jews were confined. It comprised the actual Ukraine (with the exception of the city of Kiev), Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania. Considering the measures adopted since the annexation of Eastern Poland, there is not a unique provision concerning the creation of this area: according to Cifariello, a decree of Alexander I in 1804 named *Polozhenie dlya evreev*

³² Calimani, *Passione e tragedia*, p. 10.

³³ Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, p. 27.

³⁴ Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo*, vol. IV, pp. 83-84.

³⁵ Ivi. p. 27.

(“Provisions for Jews”) is at the base of the creation of the Pale of Settlement. Nevertheless, the name and the borders of the Pale were officially defined by a decree of Nicholas I in 1835.³⁶

Even if the origins of a specific territorial institution such as the Pale of Settlement date back to the eighteenth century, the reign of Nicholas I and the 1835 *ukaz* marked a turning point in the orientation of the central government. However, already in 1827 the exoneration from the military service was abolished: since the first years after the assimilation, Russian Jews were exempted in exchange for the imposition of a further tribute.³⁷ The aim of this provision was the integration of those who left the Pale: the military service could expose them to Russian language; at the same time, Jewish soldiers were often prevented from advancing in military ranks unless they converted to Christianity.³⁸ The 1827 decree concerning the prescription to military service, indeed, allowed the wealthiest categories of the population to pay an extra tax to exempt their youngest members, as it was allowed to the Gentile population. At the same time, the minimum age for the prescription of Jewish subjects was lower, and the legislation concerning military service exposed the rest of the population to what Nathans defines as “forced integration”.³⁹

Nicholas I focused his attention on the assimilation as a way to solve the Jewish question by jeopardizing the autonomy of the communities in the Pale and promoting policies aimed at the merging with Russian population. This assimilation, however, could not take place through social and economic emancipation, as it was conceived before with the access to urban estates. In the view of the new tsar, assimilation had to be achieved both in the religious and in the administrative areas of the Jewish communities.⁴⁰ This is reflected in the provisions adopted in those years. After the creation of the Pale of Settlement and the abolition of the exoneration from the military service, indeed, other measures were adopted under the reign of Nicholas I aimed at the assimilation of the Jewish communities: in 1844, the *kabal* was officially abolished as a mechanism of self-administration, and a special censorship was imposed on Jewish books.⁴¹ This measure was set up by a specific governmental committee founded in 1840, the *Komitet dlya Opredeleniya Mer korennykh Preobrazovaniya Evreev v Rossii*

³⁶ Cifariello, *Ebrei e “zona di residenza” durante il regno di Alessandro II*, pp. 85-88.

³⁷ Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo*, vol. IV, p. 85.

³⁸ Nathans, “Jews”, p. 190.

³⁹ Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, pp. 27-29.

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 27.

⁴¹ Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo*, vol. IV, p. 84.

(“Committee for the Determination of Measures for the Fundamental Transformation of the Jews in Russia”) operating until 1863. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that this last provision did not put an end of this institution regarding its religious purposes and as a body representing the Jewish community overall.⁴²

The abolition of the *kahal* as a system of self-administration was not the only measure aimed at weakening the autonomy of Jewish communities: among the provisions proposed by the Jewish Committee, one established a network of governmental Jewish schools that predictably did not give access to higher education and where Russian was the only language spoken. These schools, however, did not find a high rate of enrolment among the Jewish community due to the general suspicion among Jews towards state-sponsored institutions.⁴³ This decree was elaborated by the Minister of Education Uvarov, who saw these reforms as a way to eradicate the influence of the Talmud in the education of Russian Jews. The Talmud, as the *kahal*, was considered as an obstacle to integration. However, the heads of the Jewish community obstructed the implementation of these provisions, and at the end of the reign of Nicholas I, the number of students enrolled at the governmental Jewish schools was rather irrelevant. Jews were also forced to take part at Christian functions that were celebrated in Yiddish in an orthodox church.⁴⁴

During the reign of Alexander II, the system ruling the Pale of Settlement was progressively reformed in order to grant to the wealthiest categories of the Jewish population the right to live outside the area: first to those who belonged to the merchant estate, and then to members with a higher level of education. The right to move in other areas of the empire was granted to those who had specific documents issued by the Ministry of Interior.⁴⁵ These reforms marked a shift in the idea of assimilation, since isolation was seen as an obstacle to it: starting from the wealthiest and influent categories of the Jewish population, the progressive dismantling of the jurisdiction concerning the Pale of Settlement would have solved the Jewish question.⁴⁶

⁴² Cifariello, *L'ombra del kahal*, p. 24.

⁴³ Nathans, “Jews”, p. 191.

⁴⁴ Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo*, vol. IV, p. 84.

⁴⁵ Cifariello, *Ebrei e “zona di residenza” durante il regno di Alessandro II*, pp. 87-91.

⁴⁶ Calimani, *Passione e tragedia*, p. 21.

Integration and Assimilation

Overall, the first half of the nineteenth century was characterized by different approaches adopted by the central government towards the juridical status of the Russian Jewry. At the period of the progressive annexation of Eastern Poland, indeed, Catherine II inherited the Polish system of “coexistence” thanks to the recognition of the *kabals* as a system of self-administration. While this approach was partially adopted by Alexander I, who saw the emancipation as a way to promote integration, Nicholas I, who officially introduced the legislation concerning the Pale of Settlement, promoted through all his reign a policy of restrictions aimed at linguistic, cultural and religious assimilation.

This distinction between integration and assimilation characterized the governmental approach towards Russian Jews during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Jewish population inherited by the Russian Empire with the partition of Poland was considered as rather peripheral in the eyes of the public opinion. However, in the decades following the annexation of Western territories, the political approach to the emerging Jewish question was heterogeneous. In this context, the institution of the Pale of Settlement was not the only key factor. Indeed, while under Alexander I “liberal” position of the government saw emancipation as a key factor determining the integration of Jewish population thanks to the access to urban estates, the reign of Nicholas I was characterized by a quite radically different approach. Considering the dismantling of the *kahal* as a system of self-administration, the central decrees that officially established the Pale of Settlement and extended the coerced military prescription to Jews, the new tsarist policies towards the Jewish community can be defined as assimilationist.

Over this period, the attitude of the Jewish population towards the central government changed too. After the acquisition of Polish-Lithuanian territories at the end of the eighteenth century, this attitude remained neutral or ambivalent, and generally characterized by obedience and subservience. This element cannot be read through the lens of patriotism, but as the result of the coexistence between the sovereign central power and the *kahal* institution, that, at that time, granted the administration of the western communities and the collection of taxes, with the exemption from military service. This approach of coexistence, however, gradually changed due to internal and external factors. A first major factor determining this change was the loss of this autonomy. At the same time, the influence of the Hasidic movement grew inside the communities. Hasidism was mainly opposed to the

kahal system as it preached independence and opposition to the central government. Moreover, another factor determined a change in the attitudes towards Russian authorities: a growing number of Jews was gradually integrating for many factors, including the access to the urban estates and a series of social changes inside the communities, mainly involving the intelligentsia, which is generally called *Haskalah*. This term, usually defined as “Jewish Enlightenment”, refers to a cultural change inside the Jewish population, mainly involving the intelligentsia and its wealthier representatives, that determined a new perspective towards the Gentile society and openness to integration.⁴⁷

Referring to the history of Russian Jews under tsarist rule, Eli Lederhendler describes how the concepts of emancipation, assimilation and Enlightenment have shaped the definition of modernity given by Jewish historians. This criterion, indeed, does not precisely conform to the case of Russia until the 1917 revolution: emancipation and assimilation, took place in a longer period than, for example, in Germany; moreover, *Haskalah* remained a quite marginal phenomenon within the Russian Jewish communities until the end of the century. This would suggest that the history of Russian Jews should be considered separately from the Western European model. The author, however, suggests that these historiographical concepts defining modernity should be reexamined: the emancipation of the Jewish population, indeed, took different paths according to the country where it took place. On the other hand, assimilation cannot be directly related to integration. This term, indeed, is inadequate in describing the process of political equality and social integration. In this sense, cultural adaptation cannot coincide with assimilation, defined by the author as “one-directional process of group disappearance”. Moreover, this process of economic and social integration was not always directly related to the spread of *Haskalah* among Jewish communities (in this sense, the case of Russia is an example since the access to urban estates offered tools of integration).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Eli Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 58-61.

⁴⁸ Eli Lederhendler, “Modernity without Emancipation or Assimilation? The Case of Russian Jewry”, in: Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 324-325.

From Anti-Judaism to Antisemitism: The Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

Considering the analysis of De Michelis, the term “antisemitism” is misused when applied before the years 1879-1880. In particular, in Russia its dominant component is religious Judeophobia. This last term specifically refers to the fear towards Jews that spread throughout the eighteenth century with the expansion eastward of the Russian Empire. Its precondition is anti-Judaism, the religious hatred typical of a broader Christian tradition. According to De Michelis, Judeophobia remained the main component of the anti-Jewish hatred in the Russian context.⁴⁹

The term “Judeophobia” was used by Klier too when referring to the origins of the Russian Jewish question in the years 1772-1825. The author defines the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century as a crucial period in the definition of the topics that are at the base of antisemitism in Russia. In particular, the religious element would have been at the core of the governmental provisions towards Russian Jews in that period: this factor has then developed throughout the nineteenth century toward myths of secrecy and conspiracy that constitute the bases of Russian antisemitism.⁵⁰

According to Nathans, until the second half of the nineteenth century Jews were a quite marginal component of the Russian population. Thus, over that period the Jewish question was perceived by Russian society as peripheric, thanks to the existence of the Pale of Settlement and the isolation and diversity of the Jewish population.⁵¹

Russian Jews presented cultural and linguistical differentiation because the autonomy under Polish rule before the annexation had guaranteed the preservation of their identity. The measures adopted under Nicholas I were aimed at eradicating it: the military prescription and the introduction of state-sponsored Jewish schools are the clearest examples. Over the first decades of the nineteenth century, however, the *Haskalah* spread among the Russian Jewish communities: its followers believed in the need of progressive integration in a liberal society, and education was considered as a key-factor in that. Thus, the so-called Jewish Enlightenment was decisive over the following decades in promoting a form of linguistic and cultural integration. This is reflected in the progressive russification of the wealthiest

⁴⁹ De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁰ John D. Klier, *Russia Gathers her Jews: “The Origins of the Jewish Question” in Russia, 1772-1825*, Dekalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 1986, pp. XIII-XIX.

⁵¹ Nathans, “Jews”, pp. 187-191.

categories of the Jewish population, also facilitated by the publications of several Jewish newspapers edited in Russian and the creation of an organization promoting the spread of education in Russian.⁵²

While the *Haskalah* was a factor promoting integration within the Jewish community, the central government took part in this process too. Alexander II, in the years of the so-called Great Reforms marked by the abolition of serfdom in 1861, opened to further changes in the jurisdiction concerning the status of Russian Jews. At the beginning of his reign, the new tsar abolished the legislation on the enrollment of Jewish soldiers and allowed certain categories of Jewish artisans and merchants to settle in other parts of the Russian Empire.⁵³ An 1862 decree conceded a series of rights to Russian Jews, including the possibility to buy real estates and to freely settle down in urban areas.⁵⁴

Löwe considers the attitude of the central government under Alexander II towards the Jewish population as “hesitant liberalization”: efforts towards religious integration were given up and Jews were progressively admitted in public schools, but, on the other hand, the government was not totally open to the development of a system that could facilitate integration. The policy of *shtyanie* (“rapprochement”) adopted by the government commission rather brought to an attitude of “selective integration”, i.e. a state control over the criteria of acceptance of a member in the local community: only members of the First Guild of Merchants and graduates of Russian universities could leave the Pale of Settlement. Other Jews could settle in other areas of the Empire only with a specific certificate.⁵⁵

While the *Haskalah* and the policies adopted under Alexander II seemed to open to a process of integration, it is also true that in the following years growing fears towards the Jewish population spread and sentiments more identifiable with antisemitism rather than anti-Judaism began to surface.⁵⁶ According to Cifariello, the reforms of censorship introduced over the years 1860s allowed Russian public opinion to discuss the Jewish question. This element, along with the demographic growth of Jewish population in those years and its

⁵² Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo*, vol. IV, p. 86.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Calimani, *Passione e tragedia*, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union”, p. 170.

⁵⁶ Ivi, p. 171.

incrementing presence outside the Pale of Settlement, determined major changes in the antisemitic discourse in Imperial Russia.⁵⁷

The second half of the nineteenth century, indeed, was also the period when the Jewish question progressively became less peripheral. This changes in public opinion had also an impact in the governmental approach. A turning point in the perception of the Jew in public opinion was the publication of the *Book of the Kabal*, by Jacob Brafman (1869), one of the first publications that theorized the idea of a network of Jewish communities all over the world ruled by secret fraternities; the *kabals* of all countries were under the control of the Paris-based Alliance Israélie Universelle, a Jewish organization founded in 1860 with the aim of monitoring the conditions of the communities abroad and promoting their emancipation.⁵⁸

The *Book of the Kabal* was important not only for the growing interest for the Jewish question among Russian public opinion, but also because it determined major changes in the specific features of Russian antisemitism. As it was previously mentioned, indeed, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the phenomenon was mostly related to religious belonging. Russian legislation did not contemplate a difference between the term *evrei* and *yudei*. In Russian this last term generally refers only to the religious belief. Nevertheless, religious belonging played an important role in the legal status of a Jew: the conversion of a Jewish citizen to Russian Orthodoxy determined their possibility to be enrolled in all the social estates, urban or rural, provided by the Russian legislation.⁵⁹ In this context, the considerations of Poliakov on the importance of the relation between the French Revolution and a Universal Jewish Alliance is thus important to understand the progressive evolution of the specific features of Russian antisemitism, determining a partial alignment with the Western perception. This shift coincides with the spread of fears related to the Jewish question and the outbreak of violence in the 1881-1884 wave of pogroms. Remarkably the term “antisemitism” was used for the first time in by Wilhelm Marr in 1879 referring to anti-Jewish hatred or prejudice that was not directly related to the religious sphere.⁶⁰

This shift towards modern antisemitism are reflected in the process of progressive industrialization that marked those years. The theories propose by Brafman in the *Book of the Kabal*, that was fundamental in defining the main features of the new antisemitism in the

⁵⁷ Cifariello, *L'ombra del kabal*, p. 45.

⁵⁸ Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo*, vol. IV, pp. 100-101.

⁵⁹ Klier, *Russia Gathers her Jews*, pp. XIII-XIX.

⁶⁰ Abraham B. Yehoshua, *Antisemitismo e sionismo: una discussione*, Torino, Einaudi, 2004, p. 31.

Russian context, could be easily related to the idea of a Jewish capitalist and cosmopolitan intelligentsia exploiting and enslaving peasants. The accusation of cosmopolitanism was important in delineating the idea of the Jew as undermining the existing order towards a liberal modernity. These characteristics of the antisemitic discourse certainly present important similarities with the accusation towards Jews that started to spread in the Western countries, notably in Germany. On the other hand, antisemitism was also incorporated in the emerging Slavophile doctrine, that by its own definition implies the idea of a Christian state. Slavophilism condemned a modern capitalistic and liberal class society: if only traditional and especially rural estates could save society from modernity, antisemitism was a consequence of that idea, as the image of the Jewish capitalist exploiter that emerged from the *Book of the Kabbalah* shows.⁶¹

The Jewish question gained relevance in the Slavophile doctrine: Nikolay Danilevsky, considered Jews as one of the nine cultural and historical categories of human civilizations. Conversely, he focused on the role played by religion in that society: for this reason he considered the Jewish civilization, among the others, as exclusively religious. Even if Danilevsky considered Jews among his list of original human civilizations in his book *Rossija i Evropa* (“Russia and Europe”, 1869), according to Savely Dudakov, anyway, the Jewish question gained relevance in the Slavophile doctrine only in the years 1880s, because of several historical events such as the Russo-Turkish War and the assassination of tsar Alexander II. In those years, Panslavism and the idea of a contrast between a liberal Europe and a unite Slavic movement under Russian guidance grew in importance. The primary role played by Russia in the idea of a Panslavic movement also had a religious connotation, since the guidance of Russia was supposed to defend Orthodox Christianity. The idea of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy was a corollary of this theory, as it was a threat to the role of Russia as a defender of Orthodoxy and an autocratic form of state as opposed to a laic and liberal Europe. Dudakov underlines the importance of the Jewish question in the Panslavic doctrine, claiming that it polarized and politicized the idea of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy creating a “national” variation of the idea that was spreading throughout Europe: while in those years the conspiracy was menacing Russia and his guidance in the fight for the

⁶¹ Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union”, p. 172.

protection of Orthodoxy and autocracy, in the years of the Bolshevik Revolution this conspiracy became global.⁶²

Overall, the events of the years 1870s and 1880s determined the emergence of antisemitic theories in Russia. The years of the Great Reforms and the alleviation of censorship facilitated the spread of the Jewish question in the public opinion, that ultimately started to gain relevance in the public debate. From being a question mainly contemplated by the central government in emanating provisions towards the consistent Jewish population that was assimilated since the expansion westward, the debate over the status of Russian Jewry took new forms. In this sense, the *Book of the Kabal* by Brafman marked a turning point, since it was the first publication denouncing the existence of a Jewish conspiracy. This idea was then adopted by the Panslavic doctrine: the role of Russia facing western modernization was threatened by a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy. The debate characterizing those years is relevant since it preceded pogroms, and marks, among other characteristics, their distinction from episodes of anti-Jewish violence that took place before 1881. In that period, indeed, the ideas relating Jews and modernity as a threat to the old order were first formulated: as explained by Dudakov, this debate is relevant also because it introduced the first theories of Jewish menace that led to the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* at the end of the nineteenth century and finally to the idea of a Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy in the years of the civil war.

The First Wave of Pogroms (1881-1884)

The spread of antisemitism in the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century can be explained as a consequence of modernization. As it was previously mentioned, the alleviation of censorship allowed a wider divulgation of the theories behind the Jewish question. Furthermore, the process of industrialization that started in those years determined growing fears in the population. The ideas exposed in the *Book of the Kabal* by Brafman reflect the shift from a religious-related discrimination towards Jews, that until those years was mainly related to political restrictions, to modern antisemitic theories of a Jewish conspiracy. All these elements are at the core of antisemitism in Imperial Russia.

Antisemitism as a factor related to a process of modernization found its concretization in episodes of anti-Jewish violence that spread in tsarist Russia. Those episodes are commonly

⁶² Savely Y. Dudakov, *Istoriya odnogo mifa: ocherki russkoy literatury XIX-XX vv.*, Moskva, Nauka, 1993, pp. 100-103.

denominated *pogroms* (deriving from the Russian verb *pogromit'*, meaning “to break” or “to attack”). This term originally referred to violence towards any targeted group. Although, the impact of anti-Jewish riots in Russian history determined the common meaning of this word.⁶³

Anti-Jewish violence was not a constant element in the history of European Jews, but it rather evolved according to the developments of the societies where Jews lived. In particular, it intensified as economic and social conditions changed, leading to the emergence of nationalism. Nationalism is thus a key-factor in identifying “national” minorities. Therefore, this interpretation does not consider violence as an *unicum* in the Jewish history, but it remarkably distinguishes between a religious-related anti-Judaism and a new kind of hatred and violence related to economic, racial or political motivations.⁶⁴ These characteristics, that according to the authors are a part of modernization, are those that determine the difference between anti-Judaism and antisemitism according.

The assassination of tsar Alexander II on 1 March 1881 contributed to polarize the growing fears towards the Jewish population, even if the regicide was organized by the Russian organization called *Narodnaya Volya*. Episodes of anti-Jewish violence took place during the Holy Week of 1881. The first pogrom in Elizavetgrad (today's Kirovograd, a city located in central Ukraine) was followed by a series of attacks against the Jewish population in the southern regions of the Pale of Settlement, among which the most significant and violent ones happened in Kiev and Odessa.⁶⁵ Even if each pogrom generally lasted few days, attacks continued for the following three years in the southern provinces of the Pale.⁶⁶

Thus, the 1881-1884 episodes of violence constitute a turning point in the history of Russian Jews: while in the previous decades the Jewish question was supposed to be solved by progressive assimilation, these pogroms showed that this solution was not possible anymore. Pogroms in late Imperial Russia also form the context in which the idea of a Judeo-Bolshevik movement started to spread in the public opinion.⁶⁷

⁶³ Jonathan Deckel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir, I. Bartal (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo*, vol. IV, p. 104.

⁶⁶ Nathans, “Jews”, pp. 197-198.

⁶⁷ Deckel-Chen, Gaunt, Meir, Bartal (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence*, pp. 3-7.

As underlined by Löwe, the phenomenon of pogroms shows the role played by violence in the history of antisemitism in pre-revolutionary Russia. These episodes of violence, anyway, do not constitute a constant factor in the period under consideration, but they rather took place in three main waves: 1881-1884, 1905-1906, and 1917-1921. These three waves taken under consideration correspond to relevant historical events. While the first wave took place following the assassination of tsar Alexander II in 1881, the second one corresponds to the 1905 Revolution, while the 1917-1921 pogroms coincide with the Civil War. The author thus underlines the relation between these episodes of violence against the Jewish population in the Russian Empire and the “widespread sense of instability” that characterized those years.⁶⁸

The wave of pogroms that spread after the assassination of tsar Alexander II does not represent the first episode of anti-Jewish violence in the Empire. The pogroms that took place in late Imperial Russia were preceded by other attacks since the beginning of the nineteenth century: Robert Weinberg, for example, refers to the 1871 anti-Jewish riot in Odessa as a prelude of pogroms in the following decade.⁶⁹ Those earlier episodes, however, are different from the three waves of pogroms under consideration. According to Jonathan Deckel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir and Israel Bartal, indeed, until the years 1880s there was the belief that the Jewish question would have been solved with progressive integration. The first wave also determined major changes within the Jewish population, whose main consequences were emigration and politicization, along with the growing influence of the Zionist movement.⁷⁰ Klier identifies two main common features of “modern pogroms” when referring to the three waves: first, those events mainly involved urban areas, among which Odessa is identified as the epicenter; moreover, the three waves present a common and distinctive “spontaneous and confused character”, without well-defined purposes.⁷¹

The intensity of pogroms was diversified according to the area of the Pale of Settlement. Few episodes took place in the northern areas that correspond to modern Belarus and Lithuania, compared to the southern regions. In the southern area corresponding to modern Ukraine (except for the city of Odessa and the Governorate of Bessarabia), indeed, Jews could settle only after the annexation of Poland. In this region, the Jewish population

⁶⁸ Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union”, p. 177.

⁶⁹ Robert Weinberg, *Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History*, in “Jewish History”, 1998, vol. 12, n. 2, pp. 71-72.

⁷⁰ Deckel-Chen, Gaunt, Meir, Bartal (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence*, pp. 3-7.

⁷¹ John D. Klier, “The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian History” in: John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza (eds.), *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 14-15.

registered a constant demographic growth during the second half of the nineteenth century, mainly because of the migration from the north. Contacts between the local population and the recently annexed Jewish population were few: through all this period, Jews were perceived as foreigners and as market competitors. On the other hand, the Jewish population was settled in the northern area of the Pale centuries before the annexation, and it played a crucial role in the economy of that region. In the Belorussian territories, Jews represented a consistent element of the population, reaching a rate of 50% and from 70 to 80% in towns. Moreover, as in the southern area, the Jewish population in the northern area registered an exponential growth during the second half of the nineteenth century, despite the migration to the southern area promoted by the central government and to the United States, and it registered a higher rate of adherence to the urban estates, namely the artisanal and commercial ones. Thus, the long presence of Jews in Belorussian and Lithuanian territories, that preceded the annexation, their integration in the urban estates with a prominent role in the economy of that area, and also their historical presence in the countryside played a mediating role between Jews and the other residents, mitigating the effects of the 1881-1884 wave of pogroms in those areas. Claire Le Foll mentions an “absence of violence” when referring to the Belorussian case. If it is possible to consider anti-Jewish violence as related to the emergence of nationalism and thus as a consequence of the change of social and economic conditions mainly connected with industrialization and urbanization, it is also true that at the beginning of the years 1880s the situation was different in Belorussia. In that region in those years, industrialization was only beginning, and the process of urbanization was also relatively slow. These two factors did not determine an influx of a new proletarian class. Urban centers in Belorussia rather registered an influx of Jews, whose community became predominant in the urban economic life. The result was a relatively low economic competition among Jews and non-Jews.⁷²

Therefore, even though Belorussia was not immune to the emerging antisemitism throughout the nineteenth century, this region did not present collective anti-Jewish attacks organized by both the peasantry and the urban classes as in the Southern regions of the Pale

⁷² Claire Le Foll, “The Missing Pogroms of Belorussia, 1881-1882: Conditions and Motives of an Absence of Violence”, in: Jonathan Deckel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir, Israel Bartal, *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, pp. 159-173.

of Settlement. Since these preconditions had not already developed in Belorussia, the author defines the hostility towards the Jewish population in Belorussia as “pre-modern”.⁷³

The characteristics of first pogroms of 1881-1884 allow a distinction with the following waves. Recent historiography has discredited the idea that the first wave functioned as a basic model for the others: research showed how the pogroms that took place during the 1905 Revolution and during the 1918-1921 Civil War were more violent and more politicized. Government orchestration also functions as a parameter allowing a distinction between the early wave and the following two.⁷⁴ Contrary to common opinion, indeed, the 1881-1884 pogroms were not government-organized, and police in some cases succeeded in repressing riots, even if the reactions of the authorities were often slow.⁷⁵

Weinberg also focuses on government participation, claiming that this element in the past diverted the perception of this historical phenomenon. The idea that the tsarist authorities took part in the organization of these riots has been progressively discredited by research. The indifference or participation of police or soldiers to pogroms, indeed, cannot be read as an active or premeditated involvement of the government. Thus, even if those episodes of anti-Jewish violence in late Imperial Russia resulted from historical events such as the assassination of tsar Alexander II, the 1905 Revolution and the Civil War, they can be effectively explained as a result of socioeconomic and political changes, and not as a “government intrigue”.⁷⁶

Löwe confirms the interpretation according to which the 1881-1884 were strictly related to social and economic conditions in the southern region of the Pale: in those years Ukraine was invested by a worldwide agrarian depression that along with recently introduced market regulations drove rioters by incrementing “resentments against emerging capitalistic economic forms and the forces of modernity embodied in the Jews”. Finally, socioeconomic change as the major cause behind the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence in 1881 is also confirmed by the proposal of reintroduction of market regulation by commissions that were established in Ukraine to examine the causes behind pogroms.⁷⁷

⁷³ Ivi.

⁷⁴ Deckel-Chen, Gaunt, Meir, Bartal (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union”, p. 177.

⁷⁶ Weinberg, *Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History*, in “Jewish History”, pp. 71-72.

⁷⁷ Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union”, p. 178.

Overall, the outbreak of pogroms at the end of the nineteenth century can be considered as a concretization of the spread of antisemitism among the population of the Russian Empire, because of the growing fears towards processes of industrialization and modernization. This is showed by the socioeconomic differences between the northern and the southern regions of the Pale of Settlement as well as by a comparison between these two areas regarding Jewish integration. Moreover, considering the three main waves of pogroms that historiography identified allows a relation with crucial historical events. All these elements contribute to discredit the idea of tsarist government participation to pogroms, as historical research shows.

Jews in Prerevolutionary Russia and the National Question

The outbreak of pogroms in 1881 had important implications for Jews in the Russian Empire, both inside the community itself and outside. It was followed by the imposition of further restrictions and by a reinforcement of antisemitic theories, that will finally lead to the publications of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1903.

Over the nineteenth century, the Jewish population of the Empire grew at a high rate, approximately five times the growing rate of the ethnically Russian population. By the end of the century, as the 1897 census showed, Jews had become the fifth largest ethnic group, and the largest non-Slavic and non-Christian one. Demographic expansion along with higher mobility outside the Pale contributed to weaken the internal communal authorities in favor of the central government. The policies of selective integration, indeed, implied a higher number of Jews living outside the Pale, reaching distant areas of the Empire. The grant of access to higher education resulted in a rate of 15% of Jews among university students. Selective integration thus determined also the access of Jews to a wider range of professions.⁷⁸

The 1897 general census organized by the tsarist administration in order to record the distribution of nationalities across the Empire, provides information on the evolution of the Jewish community. The parameters used to carry out surveys were based on the native language. Although, for certain ethnic groups such as Jews, religion was the main identifying factor applied. The census registered a community of 5,2 million people, four times higher compared to the beginning of the century. Among them, around 46% lived in urban areas.

⁷⁸ Nathans, "Jews", pp. 191-196.

While in the past the Jewish question was based on an unclear and fragmented image of the Russian Jewish population, the 1897 census marked a turning point in this sense because it provided for the first time a statistical review on the consistency of the population among the other nationalities of the Empire (at that time Russia comprised almost half of the world Jewish population) and its geographical distribution. Despite the process of selective integration and the possibility to move in other areas of the Empire that was granted to certain categories of the population during the period of the Great Reforms in the years 1860s, statistics showed that at the end of the century nearly 96% of Russian Jews still lived within the Pale of Settlement, with a registered demographic expansion of 29% in the years following the first wave of anti-Jewish violence. This growth also affected life within the community and on the government's attitude: in the aftermath of the 1881-1884 pogroms, the authorities started to claim that the outbreak of violence was due to the consistent presence of Jews in that area and the relations with the rest of the population in the context of socioeconomic transformation. As a result, both the changes within the society of the Empire, with scarce chances to move outside the Pale or to move upward in the social hierarchy because of the restrictions imposed, and the government's attitude towards them had an impact on the Jewish community.⁷⁹

As underlined by Deckel-Chen, Gaunt, Meir and Bartal regarding the 1881-1884 pogroms, Russian antisemitism at that time emerged as a result of socioeconomic changes that ultimately led to nationalism. These new ideologies emerging from the events of that time targeted new categories of "national" and even "racial" minorities.⁸⁰ According to Juliette Cadiot, in the years preceding the War that the debate over nationalities became relevant. This process is important also because the national categories identified in those years were the same recognized and institutionalized by the Soviet authorities after the Bolshevik Revolution. Comparing the 1897 imperial census on nationalities with the following researches on the population of the Empire is relevant to define the parameters on which the concept of nationality was defined. Before the second half of the nineteenth century, indeed, that statistical studies on nationalities were not carried out in Russia. In the case of the 1897 census, statisticians did not directly ask to the respondents what nationality they

⁷⁹ Alexander Orbach, "The Development of the Russian Jewish Community, 1881-1903" in: John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza (eds.), *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 138-142.

⁸⁰ Deckel-Chen, Gaunt, Meir, Bartal, *Anti-Jewish Violence*, p. 3.

belonged to, but rather their native language, faith and even the estate they belonged to. However, the 1905 Revolution determined a higher relevance of the “national question” in the political debate. The discussion preceding the 1915 census, that ultimately was not realized because of the war, showed that the public opinion was concerned about how to register a national group and about what parameters to use to identify it.⁸¹

The beginning of the twentieth century was thus marked by the emergence of the national question. Nationality progressively became a statistical category that could be used to monitor the population of the Empire. Russian Jews and their status as a national minority of the Russian Empire were affected by this debate. Defining a concept such as nationality implied a debate that also saw the participation of statisticians and ethnographers. In the case of the 1897 census, while native language was the main parameter that allowed the identification of a nationality, the Jewish population was mainly identified through religious belonging. The debate that characterized the following years, in the context preceding the First World War, showed that language, religion and estate status were not enough to identify a national group: in the case of Jews, there was the fear that religious defection of respondents would have diverted the data of the census.⁸²

Overall, the emergence of a national question and the progressively higher relevance of national identity in the public debate preceding the Great War had implications on the identity of Jews. As it was previously showed, until the second half of the nineteenth century religion was the only element identifying a Russian Jew as such and determining the imposition of political restrictions. The outbreak of pogroms of 1881-1884 showed how the “Jewish question” was not only a political question anymore, but it gained relevance in the emergence of the national question. It was in those years, indeed, that antisemitism as the result of fears towards modernization emerged.

The period following the first wave of pogroms and preceding the First World War had great consequences on the Jewish identity, both inside and outside the community. While it was in this period that the Jewish population started a process of politicization that at the end of the century was ultimately concretized by Zionism⁸³, it is also true that the growing

⁸¹ Juliette Cadiot, *Searching for Nationalities: Statistics and National Categories at the End of the Russian Empire (1897-1917)*, in “The Russian Review”, 2005, vol. 64, n. 3, p. 440-446.

⁸² Ivi, p. 450-455

⁸³ Deckel-Chen, Gaunt, Meir, Bartal (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence*, pp. 3-7.

importance of the concept of nation in the public debate had major implications even for the Jewish community and its status in the context of late Imperial Russia.

As it was previously mentioned, the public debate following the 1897 census and preceding the Great War determined a shift from religion to nationality as the key factor determining the recognition of a person as belonging to the Jewish community. This element is interesting if it is read in the light of the interpretation of Jewish identity provided by A. B. Yehoshua. According to the author, Jewish identity is flexible and fluid: while the identification of nationality with religion forms an identity which has rigid and well-defined boundaries (since conversion would imply the loss of nationality), on the other hand this peculiarity gives to Jewish identity a “virtual and free component”: the elements that define a nationality such as a common land, language and a sense of community were transposed over the centuries to a religious and ritual level, allowing the Jews of the diaspora to maintain this sense of belonging to a common identity.⁸⁴

The growing importance of national identity in the context of social transformation in the years preceding the First World War influenced both the government’s attitude towards the Jewish population and within the community itself. The first wave of pogroms, among the other features that allow a distinction from the preceding episodes of anti-Jewish violence, triggered a process of politicization of the community.⁸⁵ The first major effects was that the outbreak of violence on a large scale mainly undermined the integrationist positions taken by the Jewish intelligentsia thanks to the *Haskalah* principles. The widespread sense of insecurity along with the diminishing influence of the integrationist approach determined the fact that leaders of the community and political activists, using press and trying to build grass-roots movements, started to adopt an approach focused on the idea that the problems faced by the population could be solved thanks to the efforts of the population itself.⁸⁶

According to Alexander Orbach, one of the starting points of the political debate within the community at that time was the mass migration to North America or westward to the Austro-Hungarian Empire: among the public opinion, the idea of moving to Palestine started to gain relevance. In this sense, one of the main voices was that of Moshe Leib Lilienblum, according to whom antisemitism was strictly related to national confrontation between Jews and other

⁸⁴ Yehoshua, *Antisemitismo e sionismo*, pp. 37-55.

⁸⁵ Deckel-Chen, Gaunt, Meir, Bartal (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence*, pp. 3-7.

⁸⁶ Orbach, “The Development of the Russian Jewish Community, 1881-1903”, pp. 142-143.

national communities. Again, the idea of nation is relevant in the Jewish public opinion too, but in that case it was directly linked to the idea of the need of a common soil. In this sense, Jews should aspire to the same goal as other nationalities, i.e. the acquisition of a common independent territorial space. In that period, indeed, active organizations within the Pale emerged with the commitment to facilitate the migration of colonists to Palestine. The number of groups that shared this aim grew at the point that a common society was created, the *Hibbat Zion* (“Lovers of Zion”). This society represents a grass-roots movement, born to coordinate the work of the several organizations that were created with the common goal to facilitate the migration to Palestine; it eventually helped raising funds for migrants to facilitate the purchase of lands. The movement did not prove successful both for the organizational structure that prevented to raise a consistent number of funds and because it did not turn into a real political force. However, *Hibbat Zion* gave organizational support to the emerging idea of a national and secular Jewish community, and it even anticipated and eventually influenced the foundation of the World Zionist Organization by Theodor Herzl in 1897.⁸⁷

Overall, the year 1897 marked a turning point in the history of Russian Jews. In that year a general census was carried out to raise data on all nationalities living in the Russian Empire, that represents the first demographic study on the Jewish community; even if the criteria applied to attribute nationality (such as language, estate, or even religion as in the case of Jews) presented several uncertainties, it nevertheless testifies the growing importance of the national question in the public debate preceding the First World War. On the other hand, in that same year the World Jewish Organization was founded by Theodor Herzl: this event was anticipated by the emergence of national grass-roots movements that spontaneously grew within the Russian Jewish population in response to the first wave of pogroms. For these reasons, the end of the century was characterized by the growing importance of the national question both in the Russian public opinion overall and within the Jewish community itself: the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence, indeed, provoked a communal response and the emergence of organizations that refused integration as a solution.

The emergence of the national question and the diminishing influence of the integrationist solution within the Jewish public opinion are particularly reflected in the case of the Polish territories under Russian rule and that in 1897 registered a percentage of over 13% of Jews under its rule. Antony Polonsky showed how the Dreyfus affair, that took place in the same

⁸⁷ Ivi, pp. 143-148.

years when the debate over national identity was influencing public opinion, played a major role in shaping the conflict between the integrationist point of view of those Jews who aspired to the identity of “Poles of Mosaic faith” and the exponents of Jewish public opinion who proposed the refusal of any assimilationist approach in the name of the maintenance of national autonomy. This factor ultimately influenced the Polish political debate overall regarding the Jewish question. At that time, indeed, the two major currents shaping the political debate were the conservative and the positivist liberal approach, along with other two smaller groups such as the socialist movement and a radical antisemitic nationalist movement. Within the Polish intelligentsia, however, the dominant approach was the positivist one, which proposed assimilation as the main way to solve the Jewish question. The emergence of the national question, however, involved Polish political landscape too: the years 1890s brought a major challenge to the secular and assimilationist point of view typical of the positivist liberal ideology. The new National Democratic movement, which was gradually gaining ground, challenged the predominant liberal approach insisting on the inability of most of the Polish Jews to be absorbed: social Darwinism was at the core of this new ideology, that ultimately proposed the idea that only strong national identities could survive. Those who did not have the capacity of being assimilated would have to emigrate. On the other hand, as it was previously argued, the growing importance of national identity in the public debate did not leave the Jewish public opinion untouched: between the end of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth century, indeed, the non-assimilationist approach, strengthened by the foundation of the Zionist movement and the 1905 revolution, was the predominant position among Polish Jews. This fact, together with the impact on the public opinion of the Dreyfus Affair that was taking place in France, polarized the positivist approach towards the Jewish question: antisemitic stances started to spread among the liberal ideologues, who ultimately started to see migration as a solution.⁸⁸

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion

Research showed how the years 1880s marked the shift from anti-Judaism to antisemitism. In the case of the Russian Empire, as it was previously mentioned, this was determined by the alleviation of censorship during the period of the Great Reforms that allowed the spread of the Jewish question among the public opinion and by the publication of important works

⁸⁸ Antony Polonsky, *The Dreyfus Affair and Polish-Jewish Interaction, 1890-1914*, in “Jewish History”, 1997, vol. 11, n. 2, pp. 21-40.

such as the *Book of the Kabal* by Brafman, who introduced the first accusations that identified a Jewish world conspiracy. Historiography has also demonstrated that the action of the central government was not at the base of the outbreak of the first wave of pogroms, which were mainly the response to major socioeconomic changes in the southern area of the Empire, where there was a consistent Jewish presence. The factor that allows a distinction between previous episodes of anti-Jewish violence and the outbreak of pogroms is the relation between the Jewish question and the fear of industrial modernization: Jews were ultimately seen as the embodiment of modernization and their identification with “capitalist exploiters”.

The publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* constituted a turning point in the history of antisemitism both in the Russian context and abroad: this work was written between 1902 and 1903 in Saint Petersburg, and was published for the first time in 1903 in *Znamya*, a far-right daily newspaper directed by Pavolaky Krushevan, who is also considered as one of the authors together with Georgiy Vasil’evich Butmi and Mikhail Men’shikov. In 1905, other three editions of the *Protocols* were published in Moscow and St. Petersburg: the final version that appeared in that year was cured by Sergey Nilus, was divulged and translated worldwide after 1918. The contents of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are the product of the pre-existent growing fears towards Jews and the result of the theories behind the myth of Jewish conspiracy that spread among Russian public opinion; at the same time, their wide divulgation shows how antisemitism cannot be circumscribed to a single national context but must be considered as a transnational phenomenon. The foundation of the Zionist movement, with the organization of international congresses, and the strengthening of Jewish national identity are also at the core of this publication.⁸⁹

Even though they are rooted in the specific prerevolutionary Russian context, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are one of the foundations of antisemitic theories worldwide, and their diffusion still endures in present times; its divulgation abroad allowed the recontextualization of the theories exposed in the text, that also started to be used in the political discourse.⁹⁰ Although, the edition circulating in Russia in the first years after their publication particularly

⁸⁹ David Bidussa, Simon Levis Sullam, “Alle origini dell’antisemitismo moderno”, in: Marina Cattaruzza, Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, Enzo Traverso (eds.), *Storia della Shoah: la crisi dell’Europa, lo sterminio degli ebrei e la memoria del XX secolo, vol. 1. La crisi dell’Europa: le origini e il contesto*, Torino, Utet, 2005, pp. 83-84.

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

differs from the edition cured by Nilus, which is the same that had a wide divulgation abroad.⁹¹

Despite the wide success of the *Protocols* abroad and their importance in understanding the myth of Jewish conspiracy as a founding element of antisemitism making it a transnational phenomenon, their origins and the story behind who wrote them first and how is still obscure. Their obscure origins, anyway, are certainly related to the fact that they were presented as an authentic document, while in fact they are an assemblance of fictional texts. Resuming the research that tried to investigate on the origins of the Protocols, Michael Hagemester claims that “the myth of Jewish conspiracy has been responded with a countermyth, which is no less mysterious than the one it aims to counter”: the countermyth to which the author refers is the redaction of the text by the Okhrana, Russian secret police.⁹² The hypothesis of the redaction by the Okhrana in Paris in 1897, however, is still the predominant question in the debate over the origins of the text: in that case, the edition that was finally published in 1903 derives from a French manuscript that was readapted by the Russian secret police.⁹³

Even if the origins of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are still uncertain, behind their redaction there is a collection of texts and ideas that go back to the nineteenth century, and that are not exclusively Russian. Norman Cohn, one of the greatest scholars who dedicated their research to this phenomenon, back in 1967 recognized that the imaginary of a Jewish world conspiracy found its main source in the Protocols. At the same time, the text that was destined to have a wide divulgation all over Europe and beyond is the result of “fabrications and forgeries reaching back almost to the French Revolution”.⁹⁴ De Michelis confirms this idea, claiming that the first modern works against Jews date back to the end of the eighteenth century.⁹⁵ At the same time, however, the author considers the *Protocols* as the result of an “antisemitic subculture” that spread in Russia during the second half of the nineteenth century: the idea again is that the decades following the period of the Great Reforms, and specifically the years 1880s, are the period that marked the shift from anti-Judaism to

⁹¹ Cesare G. De Michelis, *Il manoscritto inesistente. I “Protocolli dei savi di Sion”: un apocrifo del XX secolo*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1998, p. 13.

⁹² Michael Hagemester, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: Between History and Fiction*, in “New German Critique”, 2008, n. 103, pp. 94-95.

⁹³ De Michelis, *Il manoscritto inesistente*, p. 12.

⁹⁴ Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1970, p. 29.

⁹⁵ De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, p. 18.

antisemitism: according to the author, even if these two phenomena have to be considered separately, the former, in its specific sense of fear of Judaism in its religious component, remained predominant in the Russian case and played an important role in shaping antisemitism in Russia over the last decades of the nineteenth century. The myth of a Jewish world-conspiracy, indeed, was fueled by the idea of mystery and esoterism that are associated to religious texts and institutions such as the Talmud, the *Kabbalah* and even the *Kahal*.⁹⁶

While the idea of the Jewish conspiracy was not new in Russia, and the most important example in that case is the *Book of the Kabal* published by Brafman in 1869, some components of the *Protocols* derive from a literary tradition that is at the origin of the conspiracy theories: in some cases, the texts at the base of those contents did not originally report antisemitic ideas, as in the case of the *Dialogue aux Enfers entre Montesquieu et Machiavel* by M. Joly (1864), from which some passages were directly plagiarized. The main idea behind the *Protocols*, i.e. a project for the conquest of power and control all over the world, is taken from Joly's work.⁹⁷

Overall, even if the origins of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are still uncertain, they are the result of both the specific Russian context at that time and of a wide corpus of previous literary imaginaries linked to the idea of world conspiracy. This last component is not necessarily related to antisemitism, but its functioning was adopted and readapted to the antisemitic discourse. In this sense, the widespread success of this work shows how the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy and the link between Jews and modernity as the features of antisemitism are related to the history of the nineteenth century, both in relation to the socioeconomic changes that Russia was facing and to ideas that were circulating all over Europe at that time. On the other hand, the *Protocols* also shaped the imaginary behind antisemitism in a unique way, which had major consequences in the following decades beyond the specific Russian context.

Conclusion

The Jewish question in Russia started to gain importance for the central government after the annexation of territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of the eighteenth century and the creation of the Pale of Settlement over the following decades. Since that, the approach of the imperial authorities and the legal provisions taken towards the Jewish community was not unique, but it changed over time, allowing a distinction

⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 15-17.

⁹⁷ Simon Levis Sullam, *L'archivio antiebraico: il linguaggio dell'antisemitismo moderno*, Roma, Laterza, 2008, p. 46.

between two main political approaches, integration and assimilation. Indeed, while until 1844 the central government preserved the *kahal*, a system of self-administration that ruled the Jewish communities before the annexation, under Nicholas I it was suppressed. The aim was also to favor linguistic, cultural and religious assimilation through measures such as the compulsory military service and the creation of a network of governmental Jewish schools in Russia.

The period of the Great Reforms under the reign of tsar Alexander II saw the mitigations of the laws limiting the move of Jews elsewhere in the Empire leaving the Pale of Settlement. However, this fact, together with the alleviation of censorship in those years, favored the growing importance of the Jewish question in the public debate. Until those years, indeed, the presence of Jews was perceived as rather peripheral. While until then the problem related to the presence of Jews was limited to the governmental decisions regarding an integrationist or an assimilationist approach, it was in those years that antisemitism emerged in the Russian context.

The fears towards Jews beyond the mystery related to Judaism as a religion allow a distinction between previous episodes of anti-Jewish violence and pogroms, starting from the first wave in 1881-1884. Research showed how the outbreak of pogroms in those years was not caused by governmental action, but rather by growing fears related to the socioeconomic changes that the region of the empire where they took place was facing. In the imaginary, Jews started to be associated to the idea of modernity and to the figure of capitalist exploiters.

The reactions within the Jewish community to the reverberation of pogroms progressively led to the emergence of nationalism: in those years, the idea of the necessity of migrating to Palestine rather than to North America and the growing feeling of belonging to a nation that crossed the borders of the Pale started to spread, leading to the birth of Zionism. On the other hand, in those same years the idea of nation started to gain relevance in the public opinion: following the 1897 general census, the public debate preceding the entrance into World War 1 was characterized by the question of which elements determined a national group. This debate influenced the perception of Jews, and it determined their status up until the Bolshevik Revolution.

In 1903 a first version of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was published. This work, which is at the base of the antisemitic discourse beyond the specific Russian context, contains

elements deriving from both the antisemitic ideas that emerged from the cultural debate in Russia and from a previous literary corpus related on the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy. It is also the result of a collection of previous literary works that originally did not directly refer to the Jewish question, readapting their contents to the new idea of a Jewish world-conspiracy to gain power and control. In this sense, according to Simon Levis Sullam, the *Protocols* show how the anti-Jewish imaginary works, i.e. through the re-proposal and re-adaptation of previous texts and ideas decontextualizing them.⁹⁸

The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are thus the result of a collection of ideas taken from a previous literary tradition, but at the same time they are the result of a specific antisemitic tradition rooted in Russia, which, as it was showed, can also be related to the history of the Jewish question in Imperial Russia since the end of the eighteenth century.

⁹⁸ Ivi, p. 44.

CHAPTER 2

The Blood Libel as an Element of Modern Antisemitism: The Beilis Affair

According to Albert S. Lindemann, Russia and France constitute two opposite scenarios for what concerns the Jewish question: the former is defined by the author as the “most reactionary”, while the latter as the “most progressive”. While in France Jews were granted with equal civil rights with the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* resulting from the Revolution, in Russia this “was long resisted as simply too dangerous.”⁹⁹

This fact was due to the different history of the two countries and of their Jewish communities. In the Russian Empire, the population was assimilated only at the end of the eighteenth century. Beyond that, the rapid demographic growth throughout the nineteenth century and the different economic status, determined a distinct approach to the Jewish question. Furthermore, reforms according to a “Western democratic model” could not conform to the rigidly autocratic system ruling Imperial Russia: Lindemann asserts that the central authorities feared that the end of the restrictions imposed on Jews living in the Pale would have put the Gentile population in those territories in a position of disadvantage. The Russian Empire comprised a complex multiethnic population: Jews constituted one of the national minorities living in this vast territory.¹⁰⁰

Despite these two different historical contexts, the process that brought to the affirmation of modern antisemitism at the end of the nineteenth century involved Russia too. As it was analyzed in the previous chapter, the outbreak of the first wave of pogroms in the years 1880s coincided with the diffusion of the term “antisemitism” itself, and those episodes of anti-Jewish violence were mainly related to major socioeconomic changes. For instance, as it was previously mentioned, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* resulted also from the Russian cultural context. Even if, as De Michelis underlines, Russian antisemitism has a “specific profile” mainly deriving from Judeophobia¹⁰¹, it can nevertheless be contextualized considering the emergence of modern antisemitism in Europe.

This chapter will first analyze the emergence of modern antisemitism in France, considering it as a factor deriving from the process of industrialization and the economic downturn that

⁹⁹ Albert S. Lindemann, “The Jewish Question”, in: Albert S. Lindemann, Richard S. Levy (eds.), *Antisemitism: A History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 27-28.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, pp. 14-16.

characterized the end of the nineteenth century and from the affirmation of mass politics. In the light of its evolution in France, remarkably during the Dreyfus Affair, it will then focus on the specific Russian context, considering the predominant role played by Judeophobia and the elements that allow its analysis in a European perspective. Finally, the history of the myth of blood libel will be examined considering its origins and the factors that determined its reconfiguration with the emergence of modern antisemitism in nineteenth-century Europe. The Beilis Affair will thus be analyzed as an episode of modern antisemitism in Prerevolutionary Russia. Even if the accusation of ritual murder of Mendel Beilis in 1911 shows the importance of the religious element in Russia, its political relevance along with the attention by public opinion abroad and its representation went beyond the category of Judeophobia.

The Rise of Modern Antisemitism in France

In *La droite révolutionnaire*, Zeev Sternhell underlines that back in 1898, Édouard Drumont considered antisemitism as a phenomenon that had never been related to religion, but rather an economic and social question: in this sense, it functions as an ideology that can integrate and mobilize the masses, as a “conceptualization of what can be an anti-liberal society.”¹⁰² These factors determined the emergence of political antisemitism at the end of the nineteenth century. The term “antisemitism” itself was used for the first time by the German publicist Wilhelm Marr in 1879 in order to find a word that could define the fear for Jews that did not belong to the religious but to the socioeconomical sphere.¹⁰³

Sternhell’s contextualization of antisemitism in *fin de siècle* France considers it as a component of the anti-liberal and anti-rationalist reaction culminating in social Darwinism: these theories were then politicized by intellectuals as Maurice Barrès and Édouard Drumont.¹⁰⁴ Racism became a component of the nationalist ideology; this element was then incorporated by the antisemitic, which could not be limited only to the theories of conspiracy anymore. This fact ultimately allowed an instrumentalization by right-wing movements. The idea of peril embodied by Jews could be used in the political propaganda against liberal and socialist groups.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire*, pp. 221-225.

¹⁰³ Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ Ivi, pp. 179-188.

¹⁰⁵ George L. Mosse, *Il razzismo in Europa: dalle origini all'olocausto*, Roma, Laterza, 1980, p. 132.

The affirmation of racism in the antisemitic propaganda allowed a recontextualization of the prejudices deriving from the religious anti-Judaic tradition: even if at that time the term “race” was still used without a precise definition, it nevertheless allowed the theorization of a deterministic condition of inferiority, something that goes beyond the religious belief: according to this new perception, a Jewish citizen is described as biologically inferior, and this element cannot be eradicated with the mere conversion to Christianity. From this fact derives the categorization of Jewish identity based not only on the concept of nation, but also on allegedly intrinsic ethnic and psychological elements.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, racism is not the only factor allowing a definition of antisemitism, and this can be observed considering the history of the Third Republic in France and the Dreyfus Affair. France, indeed, was the first European country to recognize equal rights to Jews in 1791, but it was also the nation where the radical right took over antisemitism for the first time.¹⁰⁷ Michele Battini analyzed how the affair determined a reconfiguration of modern antisemitism, since it determined the ultimate identification of Jews with modernity and secularization. This was the point of arrival of a long process that derived from the Revolution: Battini identifies the catholic-based “counter-Enlightenment” propaganda as the intellectual basis that determined the connection between the emancipation of Jews deriving from the principles of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* on the one hand and the exploitation of the nation by an alleged Jewish financial élite on the other. This last element derives from the traditional identification of Jews with the image of the usurer.¹⁰⁸

The Dreyfus Affair in France determined the official affirmation of the “irrational” element constituting modern antisemitism: *antidreyfusards* insisted in believing in the guilt of the official despite any proof. Even the proofs of the guilt of Colonel Hubert-Joseph Henry did not discredit the accusations moved towards Dreyfus.¹⁰⁹

The analysis of the case of late nineteenth-century France allows the identification of a common ground for political antisemitism at that time: this comprised the Proudhonian and Marxist areas along with far-right movements. This common ground allowed the rise of

¹⁰⁶ Nina Valbousquet, *Tradition catholique et matrice de l'antisémitisme à l'époque contemporaine*, in “Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine”, 2015, vol. 62, n. 2/3, p. 76.

¹⁰⁷ Richard J. Golsan, “Antisemitism in Modern France: Dreyfus, Vichy and Beyond”, in: Albert S. Lindemann, Richard S. Levy (eds.), *Antisemitism: A History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 136-145.

¹⁰⁸ Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, pp. 19-24.

¹⁰⁹ Golsan, “Antisemitism in Modern France”, p. 145.

antisemitic theories based not only on racial elements or with the identification of Jews with modernity deriving from the counter-Enlightenment tradition: the political basis enlarged allowing the identification of what Battini defines “economic antisemitism”: socioeconomic changes deriving from modernization and by the economic downturn in the years 1880s also involved France, which saw the spread of accusations towards an alleged Jewish financial élite that involved not only conservative and nationalist groups, but also clerical and socialist parties. The bankruptcy of the Union Générale, a catholic bank, in 1882 is identified as the historical fact that determined the first reactions against an alleged Jewish finance.¹¹⁰

Lindemann identified the rise of modern antisemitism with the affirmation of mass politics over the last two decades of the nineteenth century. These political movements are defined by the author as “characteristically antiliberal”, and the main source of the hostility to liberalism was mainly related to its economic models and to the concept of free market. This hostility coincided with renewed prejudices towards Jews that went beyond the religious sphere. Moreover, the politicization of the new anti-Jewish prejudices in Western Europe was also due to the fact that the lower-middle class perceived itself as economically threatened by the Jewish population.¹¹¹ Remarkably, the three affairs analyzed by Lindemann in *The Jew Accused*, among which the Beilis Affair in Kiev too, took place during the period that saw the affirmation of mass politics and of antiliberal movements along with the politicization of modern antisemitism, from 1890 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.¹¹² The beginning of this period coincides with the birth of Boulangism, considered by Sternhell as the moment that officially determined the rise of these stances to the political level. In this sense, antisemitism was perceived as a “progressive ideology”. At the end of the nineteenth century, and before the solution of the Dreyfus Affair, indeed, this ideology was shared by several political doctrines, and it was not just limited to the nationalist and far-right sphere.¹¹³

Even if in its preconditions it was a left movement opposed to moderate republicanism, Boulangism is identified as the movement that originated the radical right in France. This is due to the fact that it represented what Sternhell defined as “Jacobin anti-parliamentarism”, a movement opposed to the Constitution of 1875, proposing reforms that could increase the

¹¹⁰ Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, p. 102.

¹¹¹ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 15-21.

¹¹² Ivi, p. 29.

¹¹³ Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire*, p. 222.

executive power and “give the state a head and a brain”. Eventually, and remarkably after the affirmation of Marxism, it was clear by the end of the century that the antiliberal evolution of Boulangism was in contradiction with Jacobinism: this determined its transformation into a right-wing movement.¹¹⁴

In this sense, economic and social antisemitism was per se a component of the new ideology proposed by Boulangism, and Maurice Barrès was a key figure in its politicization. It was a corollary of the demagogy that denounced financial exploitation, and it also had a social function since it “provided the common ground on which social divisions could be overcome and the entire nation mobilized.”¹¹⁵ Social antisemitism was indeed the ideology that provided Boulangism with a popular basis: in fact many of the accusations and attacks formulated by the *antidreyfusards* had an economic and anticapitalistic connotation. According to Battini, these stances were the expression of national socialism, in the sense that they had the purpose of “integrating the proletariat in the national economic community.”¹¹⁶

One of the leading voices of French antisemitism was Édouard Drumont, who published *La France juive* in 1886. At that time, he was a supporter of Boulanger in line with his catholic corporativism. The publication of his work aroused the interest of the catholic public opinion, but it was also taken into consideration by socialist groups. Battini, indeed, considers the literary production of Drumont as the element of conjunction of the catholic anti-Judaic tradition to modern antisemitism: the Jewish question was represented as resuming the socioeconomic instability of those years. His work even presented for the first time many of the instances that later would have been at the basis of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.¹¹⁷ But Drumont’s influence was limited not only to the ideas formulated in *La France juive*, as he founded the newspaper *La Libre Parole* in 1892, a publication that played an important role in the *antidreyfusard* side during the Affair. The contribution of intellectuals such as Barrès and Drumont was fundamental in the affirmation of the theories of Jewish exploitation and for their affirmation at the turn of the century.¹¹⁸ At the core of his thought there was the idea of a Jewish race alien to French nationality threatening contemporary society both economically and culturally, also perceived as the source of decadence and corruption.

¹¹⁴ Zeev Sternhell, *National Socialism and Antisemitism: The Case of Maurice Barrès*, in “Journal of Contemporary History”, 1973, vol. 8, n. 4, pp. 48-49.

¹¹⁵ Ivi, p. 51.

¹¹⁶ Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, p. 104.

¹¹⁷ Ivi, pp. 50-54

¹¹⁸ Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire*, pp. 275-278.

Drumont addressed these issues from several perspective linking religious anti-Judaism to racism.¹¹⁹

The work of Drumont was important also because it strengthened the social function of antisemitism: he recognized the petty bourgeoisie as the social milieu where the attacks against Jewish financial exploitation would have found the highest approval. A sense of decadence was spreading through the middle class as a result of the economic downturn of those years. In this sense, Drumont was the ideologue who, among others, most remarkably understood the power of social antisemitism as an instrument that could “canalize” those fears. While many other voices of French antisemitism used anti-Jewish hatred to denounce one aspect of modern society, he transformed it in the paradigm that could explain all the contradictions and injustices of liberal democracies. According to Sternhell, from this starting point derives a “organicist conception of the world”: antisemitism, in this sense, is not a consequence of this refusal of a plural modernity, but rather a component of this conception of society.¹²⁰

Drumont’s organicist vision, however, represented the point of arrival of a debate on the Jewish question that in France started with the Boulangist anti-parliamentarism. Battini analyzed how the “anti-capitalist antisemitism” in the years 1990s transcended the political divisions, and it was rejected by European socialism only with the Dreyfus Affair. Remarkably, the International Socialist Labor Congress of Brussels in 1891 showed how the denunciations of an alleged Jewish financial élite still survived in many socialist areas. This was mainly due to the inability to recognize that part of those prejudices derived from religious anti-Judaism. Beyond that, the European socialists of the Second International overlooked the different life conditions and the lack of emancipation of Eastern European Jews. This was part of the socialist historicist vision: the conditions of Jews living in the Pale would have changed only after the fall of the old tsarist order, and the problem of Jewish emancipation would have been solved only with the affirmation of socialism. According to this view, emancipation would have been reached only with the assimilation, and thereby with the loss of national identity, as Hannah Arendt remarked in 1932 in *The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question*.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Levis Sullam, *L'archivio antiebraico*, p. 36.

¹²⁰ Ivi, pp. 249-256.

¹²¹ Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, pp. 65-76.

Then, it was the debate around the scandals of the Dreyfus Affair in those years that determined a turning point for the French left wing. Even if antisemitic prejudices with economic connotations survived in the following years, exponents of that political area after the affair could not openly express it anymore. Moreover, the migration from Russian territories of the Pale involved France too: in those a Jewish proletariat was consolidating, and this changed the socioeconomic profile of the community in France, in contradiction with the idea of a Jewish financial élite that was shared by labor parties too. At the turn of the century, antisemitism was not part of the left-wing political propaganda anymore. It only survived in the radical area, as showed by the denounces of being financed by Jewish bankers moved to the reformists.¹²²

As a result of this process of reconfiguration of French politics during the Dreyfus Affair, in the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War social antisemitism became an element of the nationalist ideology, notably in the case of *L'Action française*, a far-right movement that proposed the restoration of the *Ancien Régime* through the instauration of a corporatist system in contrast to what was identified as the modern and liberal individualism. The decadence of modern society denounced by this movement's ideology was also the result of the emancipation of French Jews: Charles Maurras, one of the leaders of *L'Action française*, saw in the Dreyfus Affair a confrontation between the principles of the 1789 *Declaration* and an authoritarian vision of society aimed at national unity.¹²³

Overall, the affirmation of modern antisemitism can be considered as a result of both the economic downturn at the end of the nineteenth century and the rise of mass politics. Boulangism is commonly identified as the movement that determined its politicization. As the production of Édouard Drumont shows, in the modern world the Jewish question was not mainly related to religion, but rather to social and economic factors. While at first antisemitic stances were shared by different political areas including left-wing groups, the Dreyfus Affair determined both the affirmation of the “irrational” component of these views and its rejection by socialism. As a consequence of these changes, over the decade preceding the Great War antisemitism was one of the main points characterizing the new corporatist ideology, both for the denounces of a modern society controlled by a Jewish financial élite and for the refusal of Jewish emancipation as an element disrupting social unity and as the

¹²² Michel Dreyfus, *L'Antisemitisme à gauche : histoire d'un paradoxe, de 1830 à nos jours*, Paris, La Découverte, 2009, pp. 69-97.

¹²³ Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, pp. 93-97.

concretization of the Enlightenment ideals of the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*.

Distinctive Characteristics of Modern Antisemitism in Imperial Russia

Imperial Russia represents a radically different approach to the Jewish question: according to Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, the tsarist system embodies a “pre-capitalist corporatist framework” for its policies of active interventionism in Jewish communal life. Throughout the nineteenth century, this approach was mainly translated into reforms aimed at the integration of Jews both in the administrative system, notably with the abolition of the *kahal*, and at a cultural level, mainly through education. Compulsory military prescriptions can be ascribed to these policies too. Löwe argues that this interventionist approach did not offer incentives for Jewish emancipation, and it contributed to the creation of the ground for antisemitism.¹²⁴

During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the attitude of the central government changed, giving up to the efforts aimed at Jewish assimilation. It was in this context that modern antisemitism started to emerge in Russia: many officials feared that the process of industrialization would have determined the rise of a Jewish capitalist class at the expense of the peasant population. According to this view, the *kahal* constituted a system controlled by a Jewish intelligentsia aimed at the subjugation of the population. As it was analyzed in the previous chapter, the *Book of the Kahal* by Brafman contributed to the creation of the imaginary of an international system of Jewish organizations conspiring for the control of Christians. Well before the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, this book helped the formation of the myth of a Jewish world conspiracy. Consequently, over the decades preceding the 1917 Revolution, Jews started to be associated to the idea of “cosmopolitanism”. This association derived both from the borrowing of materials from the West, notably from Germany, and from other Russian sources, e.g. from influent writers such as Fëdor Dostoevsky.¹²⁵

In particular, De Michelis identifies the “anti-nihilist novel” as the literary genre that participated to the formation of the modern antisemitic accusations. A precondition of this genre was the social relevance of literature as a tool to contrast the modernization of society resulting from democratic reforms, liberalization and laicism. Anti-nihilist literary production

¹²⁴ Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union”, pp. 166-167.

¹²⁵ Ivi, p. 170-172.

formulated many of the themes that are at the core of Russian antisemitism, notably the idea that revolutionary movements were controlled by Jews.¹²⁶

A major contribution was certainly given by the Slavophile doctrine. However, ideologues of this intellectual movement such as Ivan Aksakov combined the idea of Jews as capitalist exploiters subjugating the rural population with religious prejudices. Antisemitism was per se a corollary of the glorification of peasants on which Slavophilism was based. This doctrine theorized an organicist state free of modern classes, and Jews were condemned as the “inventors” of the new social structure emerging from industrialization. Moreover, the model of state proposed by Slavophism was uniformly Christian: they thus combined modern antisemitic accusations with religious anti-Judaism.¹²⁷

According to De Michelis, the categories that are generally used to analyze antisemitism in the “Roman-Germanic world” cannot be applied to the Russian cultural context. This interpretation is based on the distinction between antisemitism, religious anti-Judaism and Judeophobia. This last term refers to the fear towards Jews that spread in Russia from the eighteenth century; even if this fear is mainly related to the Christian belief, it must be distinguished from anti-Judaism since it was reinforced by the idea of “mystery” surrounding the Jewish world. This last element is at the core of the idea of conspiracy on which important works such as the *Book of the Kahal* were based. According to De Michelis, in Russia Judeophobia remained the main component of anti-Jewish prejudices and hatred.¹²⁸

However, at the beginning of the twentieth century and before the 1917 revolution, the political propaganda of nationalist right-wing movements gave relevance to the idea that the integrity embodied by the Russian state was menaced by changes brought by modernity. Such risks came from outside the Russian society and were alien to it. Because of their association in the collective imaginary to the concepts of cosmopolitanism and modernity, Jews were perceived as the main factor that put the morality of Russia at stake.¹²⁹ The link between Jews and the idea of a decadent modernity can be interpreted as an element realigning Russian antisemitism to the accusations formulated in Western Europe.

¹²⁶ De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, p. 28.

¹²⁷ Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union”, p. 172.

¹²⁸ De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, pp. 16-18

¹²⁹ Ivi, p. 20.

Löwe considers the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a publication that gave voice to the fears of Russian conservatives. The idea of a Jewish-Masonic Plot to reverse society and exert control on the local population can indeed be compared to the fears expressed by the Russian right-wing propaganda.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the *Protocols* can be considered as the result of a collection of themes coming both from the Western tradition (the most remarkable example is the contribution given by the *Dialogue aux Enfers* by Joly), and from the specific Russian cultural context, notably from the *Book of the Kabal*. At the same time, the influence of the *Protocols* went far beyond Russian borders, and they became a fundamental publication in the history of the affirmation of modern antisemitism in Europe. They can be thus considered as an element of connection of Russian antisemitism to the European context overall, despite its specific Judeophobic component and the different historical background.

The importance of religious elements in the anti-Jewish hostility in Russia is also underlined by Lindemann: in Russia the racist component of antisemitism was relatively weak. The ritual murder accusation itself could be rarely found in Western Europe and was scarcely used by the antisemitic propaganda.¹³¹

Even if Judeophobia remained the dominant component in the Russian cultural context, antisemitism reached the political sphere. The reign of tsar Nicholas II was also characterized by an intensification of anti-Jewish persecution: in 1905 a second wave of pogroms occurred, anticipated by a massacre in 1903 in Kishinev. These attacks saw the participation of nationalist groups, among which the Black Hundreds (*Chërnyaya Sotnya*). According to Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, at the beginning of the twentieth century antisemitic ideology clearly became a part of the government program.¹³²

During the 1905 Revolution, Prime Minister Sergey Witte opened to measures that would have granted equal rights for Jews. However, the dissolution of the first and the second Duma prevented the adoption of such measures. Thereafter, according to Löwe the newly appointed Prime Minister Pëtr Stolypin was more likely to follow the tsar's refusal of any concessions, even if he managed to prevent the use by the government of the *Protocols* for its propaganda. The 1907 electoral law reduced the representation of lower classes and of national minorities, and Jews were excluded from laws concerning civil rights. The third

¹³⁰ Löwe, "Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union", p. 175.

¹³¹ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, pp. 35-37.

¹³² Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Antisemitismo*, Milano, Bibliografica, 1997, pp. 38-39.

Duma, indeed, adopted a more radical approach: a new law excluded Jews from the higher ranks of the army even after the conversion to the Orthodox church.¹³³

According to Lindemann, the turmoil of the year 1905 was not only at the base of the second wave of pogroms and his effects were not limited to anti-Jewish resentment among the local population. In that year, the antisemitic attitude of central authorities became more evident. Following the revolution in that year, tsar Nicholas II himself did not really understand the level of discontent among the population. Lindemann asserts that the emperor necessarily gave the responsibility of the revolution to “foreign” groups, among which notably Jews. But the central authorities’ antisemitism was not only limited to the belief that Jews were responsible for popular agitation: both Nicholas II and many government officials believed that Jewish finance was also actively involved in the crisis that Russia was facing. The then Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Lamsdorf was also convinced that the 1905 Revolution was directed by international Jewish efforts, under the guide of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in France.¹³⁴

Changes concerning the situation of the Jewish population of the Pale of Settlement had consequences that went beyond the borders of the Empire: as it was analyzed in the previous chapter, the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence with the first wave of pogroms in the years 1880s not only strengthened the feeling of national belonging within the community, but it also boosted the rate of migration abroad. Most importantly, it incremented the community in the United States, and it also involved the first settlements in Palestine. Migration from the Pale also concerned Western Europe, notably the Jewish communities in Great Britain, Germany and France.¹³⁵

It was in those years that nationalist groups among which notably the Black Hundreds strengthened their support among the population. Antisemitism was at the core of the ideology of these groups, as their participation to the second wave of pogroms shows. Over the first decade of the twentieth centuries, such groups enlarged their social basis, remarkably among the urban lower classes. Following the 1905 Revolution, anti-constitutionalism became one of the main points of their political ideology along with anti-capitalism. In this sense, reforms were perceived as the result of a Jewish conspiracy with the participation of

¹³³ Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union”, p. 175-176.

¹³⁴ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, pp. 167-171.

¹³⁵ Luzzatto Voghera, *Antisemitismo*, pp. 38-39.

liberals that in the long term would have facilitated the success of socialist groups. Notably, they also found support among members of the Orthodox Church. At the same time, as Löwe underlines, traditional anti-Judaism paved the way to the rise of modern antisemitism, as the political propaganda of groups as the Black Hundreds made use of Christian symbology and certainly reinforced their antisemitic stances with the use of typically anti-Judaic accusations. It was the case of the Beilis Affair. The reemergence of the myth of blood libel with the 1911 case relied on a traditional religious anti-Judaic basis. Nevertheless, the trial soon assumed political significance, and rumors on the ritual purposes of the murder were spread by the Black Hundreds for political reasons, mainly to prevent reforms of the limitations imposed on Jews.¹³⁶

While the religious component of antisemitism was stronger in the Russian context, there are also elements that allow a comparison with Western countries, notably with France. For what concerns the civil rights of Jews, the situation in Russia generally represented the concretization of the restrictions proposed by antisemitic groups in France. The rise of modern antisemitism in prerevolutionary Russia was determined by different preconditions than in Western European countries and presented distinctive characteristics beyond the different legal status of the Jewish population, such as the importance of elements connected to the religious anti-Judaic tradition. The marginal role played by racism proves the fact that Judeophobia remained the dominant component, as in the analysis by De Michelis. This last point also allows a contextualization of the Beilis Affair in 1911 and the myth of blood libel. A ritual murder accusation, indeed, could not be instrumentalized in France by antisemitic groups as it was in Russia.

Nevertheless, despite these differences, Russian antisemitism can be contextualized at a European level for several reasons. One of the roots of the myth of Jewish world conspiracy was indeed the element of “mystery” surrounding Judaism as it was perceived in Russia, as underlined by De Michelis. The idea of mystery surrounding Talmudic prescriptions or the functioning of the *kehal* are at the core of the Russian contribution to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, whose publication determined the affirmation of antisemitism at a political level in Europe overall. The *Protocols* are thus one of the main factors that allow a realignment of Russian antisemitism with the European context. Beyond that, some elements are not directly related to Judeophobia: already during the second half of the nineteenth century,

¹³⁶ Löwe, “Antisemitism in Russia and the Soviet Union”, pp. 175-176.

Slavophilism portrayed Jews as a disruptive element for national unity both from a religious point of view and, notably, because they were perceived as responsible for the changes brought by liberal modernity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, and remarkably after the 1905 Revolution, these accusations reached the political sphere. The identification of Jews with modernity and cosmopolitanism are a clear element of antisemitism, as it is analyzed by Luzzatto Voghera.¹³⁷

The Myth of Ritual Murder in Nineteenth-Century Europe

Originally, the ritual murder accusation is an element of religious anti-Judaism. It was particularly rooted in the Roman catholic tradition in Western Europe since the Middle Ages, but the origins of the myth date back to the Roman Empire: when early Christians were persecuted, they were often charged of murders with ritual purposes; it then reappeared in England in the twelfth century, then spreading in Europe. Starting from the sixteenth century, cases of blood libel accusations then partly disappeared in Central and Western Europe for several reasons: the penal system changed, and in the German world the use of torture for the extortion of a confession disappeared; moreover, Protestantism rejected the transubstantiation dogma, and this factor undermined the belief in ritual murders. On the other hand, throughout the Modern Era the blood libel accusation remained rooted in the areas of Eastern Europe which were traditionally Catholic, namely the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹³⁸

A part of those Eastern European regions was annexed by the Russian Empire at the end of the eighteenth century, then becoming part of the Pale of Settlement. The belief in ritual murder was not shared by the Orthodox Christian tradition in the Russian Empire. Cases of ritual murder accusations could not then appear until the end of the eighteenth century, indeed, since the Jewish presence in the Empire was quite marginal. The fact that it was not originally rooted in the Russian culture is also underlined by De Michelis: it emerged only after the annexation of the Jewish population of the Pale, and one of the first cases was in 1799, a fact that was reported by Gavriil Derzhavin.¹³⁹

Thus, it was only after the annexation of the territories where the Pale of Settlement would have then been established that the myth of ritual murder committed by Jews started to be

¹³⁷ Luzzatto Voghera, *Antisemitismo*, pp. 16-25.

¹³⁸ Robert Weinberg, *The Blood Libel in Eastern Europe*, in "Jewish History", 2012, vol. 26, n. 3/4, pp. 275-276.

¹³⁹ De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, pp. 22-23.

absorbed by the Orthodox Christian tradition, in a period when it started to reemerge also in the Western World. It is nevertheless important to notice how this revival, that took place in a period of modernization and continuous socioeconomical changes, differed from the ancient accusations. It was still presenting a supernatural component, which partly derives, as it was previously mentioned, from the transubstantiation dogma, partly from folkloristic elements; on the other hand, blood libel accusations in the modern world were also reinforced by the search for medical and scientific proofs. While all these elements contributed to reshape it, it is also true that the emergence of modern antisemitism and the mass circulation of news regarding judicial cases throughout the Empire made the divulgation of the belief in blood libel possible.¹⁴⁰

Even though the myth of ritual murder was not rooted in the Russian Orthodox tradition, it still had a significant role in Russian antisemitism. Between the nineteenth and the twentieth century pamphlets appeared encouraging to attack Jews and claiming that Judaism prescribed the murder of Gentiles for religious purposes. Such accusations often accompanied even the outbreak of pogroms, and sometimes it even triggered them, as in the case of the one in Kishinev in 1903.¹⁴¹

Hallal J. Kieval analyzed how the main features of this accusation had to be readapted to the new judicial system by taking examples six examples, among which the Beilis trial too: when this phenomenon reappeared in Central and Eastern Europe, indeed, the folkloristic elements that are at the core of the blood libel were not suitable anymore for a judicial system whose boundaries of plausibility of accusations were defined by scientific evidence. For this reason, the prosecution and the defense in ritual murder trials had to adopt a scientific and medical vocabulary.¹⁴²

In the Russian case too, ritual murder accusations were based both on folklore and on attempted scientific proofs. It also started to be considered on a political level already in the mid-nineteenth century: at that time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire formed a commission aimed at investigating the alleged ritual use by Jews of the blood of Christian Children. Vladimir Dal', a Russian folklorist and member of this commission, wrote

¹⁴⁰ Weinberg, *The Blood Libel in Eastern Europe*, pp. 276-278.

¹⁴¹ Elissa Bemporad, *Empowerment, Defiance, and Demise: Jews and the Blood Libel Specter under Stalinism*, in "Jewish History", 2012, vol. 26, n. 3/4, p. 344.

¹⁴² Hillel J. Kieval, *The Rules of the Game: Forensic Medicine and the Language of Science in the Structuring of Modern Ritual Murder Trials*, in "Jewish History", 2012, vol. 26, n. 3/4, pp. 287-289.

a report on the ritual use of blood by Jews already in 1844. This report was then published and divulged at the time of the Beilis trial and was used by the Court judging the case in 1913.¹⁴³ Back to the 1840s, this document, published with the title *Rozyskanie ob ubienii evrejami khristianikh mladentsev I upotreblenii krovi ikh* (“Inquiry on the Murder of Children of Christian Faith Committed by Jews and the Use of Their Blood”), was compiled by Dal’ for the work of this commission after a case of ritual murder accusation in Damascus in 1840.¹⁴⁴

The Damascus Affair was important for the reappearance of the myth of ritual murder committed by Jews in nineteenth-century Europe. It involved thirteen Jews accused of killing a catholic missionary in the city that at that time was part of the Ottoman Empire. Furio Jesi considers the case as indicating the main features of the blood libel in the modern era: the debate emerging from this affair that involved public opinion all over Europe presented the re-proposition of an accusation that dated back to centuries before, but with new elements. Publications on the Damascus Affair, indeed, show how it was interconnected with historical and socioeconomic elements that derive from the process of modernization that was taking place at that time. The accusations against Jews were mainly related to their specificity as a social group that started to benefit of equal rights and obligations as other citizens, rather than from the typical elements that the Catholic tradition identified as constituting a case of ritual murder.¹⁴⁵

Sabina Loriga remarks a discontinuity in the history of the ritual murder accusations, highlighting three phases that historians identified in which it evolved: while the first, in the twelfth century, coincided with the Crusades, the second, over the fifteenth century, corresponded to the fear of plague and the threat of heresies; the third one, in the nineteenth century, presented new features. Its first manifestation was the Damascus Affair, and the debate around this case re-proposed the blood libel not only as a reiteration of deicide, the typical anti-Judaic accusation, but also as a manifestation of an international Jewish conspiracy. In this last feature, the blood libel in the modern era cannot be only related to religious anti-Judaism but must be considered as an element of modern antisemitism.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Alan Dundes, “The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study of Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion”, in: Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, p. 346.

¹⁴⁴ De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁵ Furio Jesi, *L'accusa del sangue: la macchina mitologica antisemita*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2007, pp. 36-42.

¹⁴⁶ Sabina Loriga, *Une vieille affaire ? Les “Pâques de sang” d’Ariel Toaff*, in “Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales”, 2008, 1, p. 145.

The Damascus Affair was a turning point in the history of modern antisemitism also for Lindemann. The importance of this case, indeed, does not rely only on the ritual murder accusation in the modern era, but also on the fact that its resonance went beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire, and saw the involvement of French government. Confessions were extorted from the accused with the use of torture, and once the process started, the French consul in Damascus, backed by the French government, gave his support to the charges of ritual murder. The reasons behind this rely on the geopolitical interests that France had for that area of the Ottoman Empire in 1840, thus exploiting the popularity of that case in order to consolidate French influence in Damascus. Support given by the French diplomat relied on an antisemitic press campaign.¹⁴⁷

The Damascus Affair thus brought an important contribution to the reemergence of the myth of blood libel over the nineteenth century, the same period when it was incorporated in Russian Judeophobic tradition. It was right after this case that the myth also gained political relevance with the commission formed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that also saw the participation of Dal' with his publication on the ritual murder. This document was also at the base of a book by Ippolit Lyutostanskiy in 1880 called *Ob upotrebenii evreyami (talmudicheskimi sektatorami) kbristianskoy krovii dlya religioznykh tselei* ("On the use of blood by Jews of Talmudic sects for ritual purposes"). According to De Michelis, this book favored the spread of this myth in the Russian public opinion, especially because of the interest of tsar Alexander III. Another important aspect of this publication is that it proposed the link between ritual murders and Talmudic prescriptions, thus defining it as a religious dogma. This idea, then, was also re-proposed during the Beilis trial in 1913.¹⁴⁸

Overall, the importance of the Damascus Affair also depends on the fact that it was instrumentalized by a Western government to consolidate its influence in that area. Support given by France to the antisemitic accusations is particularly interesting, as the country under consideration at that time was perceived as a model of modern state that embodied liberal and enlightened principles, where Jews had finally reached equal rights and obligations as other citizens.

Furthermore, historians identified the Damascus Affair as being at the origins of the reformulation of the myth of blood libel that marked the beginning of a series of accusations

¹⁴⁷ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, pp. 35-37.

¹⁴⁸ De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, p. 24.

upon Jews that characterized the second half of the nineteenth century up to the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In an introduction to the work of Jesi, David Bidussa underlines how the modern myth of blood libel, as it was previously mentioned, allowed the conciliation of the religious and spiritual elements deriving from the typically anti-Judaic accusation of deicide, with the myth of Jewish conspiracy. According to Bidussa, these two mechanisms shaped modern antisemitism, and they characterized all the modern trials involving Jews that captured the attention of public opinion, and not only those based on accusations related to the religious sphere, but also judicial cases based on political facts, among which, *in primis*, the Dreyfus Affair.¹⁴⁹

Tracing the history of the myth of blood libel in the nineteenth century is thus useful to understand how the rhetoric behind it is directly related to the main features of modern antisemitism. Overall, ritual murder accusation as a component of anti-Judaism was not originally a part of the Orthodox-Christian Russian culture. It derives from the acquisition of territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, which then were part of the Pale of Settlement. Since the Roman Catholic confession was particularly rooted in those recently acquired areas of the Empire, where the Jewish presence was relevant and had a long history, the blood libel could then be adopted by the Russian culture throughout the nineteenth century. It is the same period when, despite the increasing modernization and the affirmation of a new judicial system, episodes of murders charged on Jews for ritual purposes reemerged. For this reason, the features of the blood libel changed: even if it is true that its core elements mainly derived from a folkloristic tradition, ritual murder accusations in the modern era had to adopt medical and scientific features in order to be eligible as court cases. Finally, the spread of antisemitism in Russia and the increasing circulation of news regarding judicial cases in other areas of the empire can explain the emergence of this accusations in the specific Eastern European context. The blood libel gained importance on a political level too, and this is proved by the existence of a commission set up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to investigate the use of Christian children's blood by Jews for ritual purposes. It was in this context that the Beilis Affair took place at the beginning of the twentieth century.

¹⁴⁹ David Bidussa, "Retorica e grammatica dell'antisemitismo", in: Furio Jesi, *L'accusa del sangue: la macchina mitologica antisemita*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, pp. XVII-XXI.

From the Blood Libel to Modern Antisemitism

According to George L. Mosse, the origins of the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy, that at the beginning of the twentieth century culminated in the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, can be traced considering the history of the myth of blood libel since the ancient times.¹⁵⁰

Francesco Crepaldi considers the legend of ritual murders between the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century as transforming a traditionally anti-Judaic accusation into a theme of political relevance: an element of transition toward modern antisemitism.¹⁵¹ According to this interpretation, antisemitism is not limited to religious aspects or to socioeconomic factors: ritual murders suppose a link between the crime and what Nina Valbousquet defines “an ontological an dehumanizing inferiority of Jews”.¹⁵² In this factor lies the difference between a religious anti-Judaism and what can be defined as modern antisemitism, which cannot be theologically accepted by the catholic doctrine, as it contradicts the opportunity of redemption for Jews and denies the possibility of solving the Jewish question through the mere conversion.¹⁵³

Régis Ladous, however, underlined how every accusation of ritual murder in the modern world is by itself rooted in the Christian tradition, even when it's formulated or discussed in an article by a person who is not a believer. Its narration is necessarily based on an amplification, since the myth of blood libel in a modern laic society consists in the reformulation of a legend that originally belonged to the medieval and Christian world. Remarkably, even its confutation cannot overlook the religious element, either to denounce Catholicism as the source of an anti-Judaic tradition or to show that ritual murders are not contemplated by the religious doctrine.¹⁵⁴

For all these reasons, the reemergence of the myth of blood libel can be ascribed to the category of modern antisemitism, since it was not based anymore only on prejudices belonging to the anti-Judaic tradition. Episodes of ritual murder accusations in the nineteenth

¹⁵⁰ Mosse, *Il razzismo in Europa*, pp. 124-129.

¹⁵¹ Francesco Crepaldi, “L’omicidio rituale nella moderna polemica antiggiudaica di Civiltà cattolica nella seconda metà del XIX secolo”, in: Catherine Brice, Giovanni Miccoli (eds.), *Les racines chrétiennes de l’antisémitisme politique (fin XIX-XX siècle)*, Roma, École française de Rome, 2003, pp. 61-62.

¹⁵² Valbousquet, *Tradition catholique et matrice de l’antisémitisme à l’époque contemporaine*, p. 78.

¹⁵³ Ivi, pp. 67-70.

¹⁵⁴ Régis Ladous, *Alle origini cristiane dell’antisemitismo politico: le accuse di omicidio rituale*, in “Studi storici”, 1998, vol. 39, n. 3, pp. 725-726.

century since the Damascus Affair in 1840 gained a political relevance and were based on facts that went beyond the religious sphere.

Like Battini, Ladous considers Drumont as one of the intellectuals that determined the union between the catholic tradition and racial antisemitism, as his remarks on the myth of blood libel show: in an introduction to a pamphlet by Henri Desportes, Drumont defined ritual murders as a “monomania” ascribable more to physiological and ancestral aspects typical of “the Semites” rather than to a mere religious practice. Even if he could not transcend the religious elements that are at the origins of this myth, he considered it as a manifestation of a neurosis physiologically manifested in Jews. Drumont explained the absence in modern times of cases of ritual murder accusations in Western countries as a result of a process of evolution of this neurosis: the migration from Eastern Europe allowed them to renew their life condition and to change environment. This element, according to Drumont, determined a sort of recovery from what he considered to be a hereditary element typical of Jews.¹⁵⁵

The remarks by Drumont on the blood libel can be contextualized considering the intellectual debate that was triggered by the Damascus Affair in 1840, starting with the publication of the book *Relation historique des affaires de Syrie* by Achille Laurent in 1846. During the Dreyfus Affair, the *Talmudjude*, a controversial work written in 1871 by the German scholar August Rohling, was translated in French. Ladous considers it as the book that revived the myth in the nineteenth century, formulating many of the “scientific proofs” that would have then been used in judicial cases on alleged accusations of ritual murder. Notably, the work of Rohling enriched the debate in France in the years of the rise of modern antisemitism, but since the years 1890s the interest on the theme decreased.¹⁵⁶

The scarce interest that the myth of blood libel had in France following those years is mainly due to the fact that it could only constitute an accessory and marginal element in the political propaganda of antisemitic groups that was mainly focused on the financial accusations to a progressive and liberal Jewish intelligentsia: it could not be instrumentalized against “secularized” Jews such as Alfred Dreyfus or the Rothschild family. Modern antisemitism needed general accusations against the Jewish population overall. In this sense, the tendency to commit ritual murders started to be considered as a degenerative component of the Jews

¹⁵⁵ Ivi, p. 729.

¹⁵⁶ Ivi, pp. 726-727.

as a race, as in the case of Drumont's thought.¹⁵⁷ This element confirms the analysis of Lindemann, who considers the reemergence of the myth of blood libel in Russia as an element distinguishing Russian antisemitism, which relied more on religious elements than in other contexts such as in France. Drumont himself was not religious and did not use anti-Judaic accusations in his works. Generally, the racial component of antisemitism did not find a wide success in Russia. Conversely, the rise of modern antisemitism in France was also related to the affirmation of social Darwinism. Even Drumont perceived ritual murders as the manifestation of a tendency that could be explained considering a racial element.¹⁵⁸

The myth of blood libel can be thus considered as a factor allowing a European contextualization of Russian antisemitism, as originally it was alien to the Orthodox tradition and appeared in that context only in modern times, when it was reconfigured as a feature of modern antisemitism. The Beilis Affair in 1911-1913 was based on this accusation, but its relevance went beyond, as it will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Modern reconfiguration of the myth of Ritual Murder in the Beilis Affair

In 1911 Menahem Mendel Beilis, the Jewish manager of a Ukrainian brick factory, was accused of the murder of twelve-year old Andrey Yushchinsky, whose body was found brutally stabbed in the periphery of Kiev. The case was identified as a ritual murder: the trial in 1913 had great resonance both in Russia and abroad and divided the public opinion, arousing interest on the conditions of the Jewish citizens of the Empire: many foreign observers condemned the tsarist regime on that occasion. All accusations against Beilis were finally discredited, even if the verdict still considered the case as a ritual murder, and later it was proved that a band of thieves committed the crime.

According to Robert Weinberg, the Beilis Affair was the most controversial blood libel prosecution in the modern era. It aroused the interest of public opinion also outside Russia, bringing attention on the problem of antisemitism in the Empire and it "inspired opponents of the autocracy at home and abroad to launch a campaign to condemn the trial".¹⁵⁹ The attention that the case received, indeed, is also related to the active involvement of the state in the trial, namely with actions taken by the Minister of Justice Ivan G. Shcheglovitov. Even

¹⁵⁷ Ivi, 728-731.

¹⁵⁸ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 135.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Weinberg, "Connecting the Dots: Jewish Mysticism, Ritual Murder, and the Trial of Mendel Beilis", in: Maria Di Salvo, Daniel H. Kaiser, Valerie A. Kivelson (eds.), *Word and Image in Russian History: Essays in Honor of Gary Marker*, Brighton, Academic Studies Press, 2015, p. 238.

though at the end of the trial in 1913 the accused was declared not guilty, the jury agreed with the prosecution on the fact that the case presented signs of a ritual murder, even if there was evidence of the involvement of a group of thieves as murderers.¹⁶⁰

The importance of the case also depends on the place where it happened: Kiev was located in the Pale of Settlement, and yet Jews residing there had a different legal status than in the rest of that area of the Empire. Due to the religious importance of the city for Russian Orthodoxy, it was generally forbidden to Jews to live there, and those who had the special residency permission had a more vulnerable and fragile status. As it was previously analyzed, the epicenter of anti-Jewish violence, especially in the first wave of pogroms, was the southern region of the Pale. Due to the situation of Jews living in Ukraine and to their precarious status in Kiev, the Beilis Affair did not see the mass mobilization of the local Jewish community, but it aroused the interest of Western communities and organizations, which played an essential role in the increasing awareness of public opinion abroad.¹⁶¹

The murder took place in Kiev in 1911: Andrey Yuschinsky, a twelve-year old Ukrainian, disappeared on March 11th; his corpse was found nine days later, on March 20th, in a cave located about five miles from his home. The body presented signs of brutal mutilations, and according to the Committee, rumors pointing the killing of Yuschinsky as a case of ritual murder started to circulate right after the finding. Such rumors then joined the political sphere, as the nationalist political party *Soyuz Russkogo Naroda* (“Union of the Russian People”) demanded an inquiry of the Government about the state of the investigations at the national Duma.¹⁶²

Back in 1966, Hans Rogger confuted the idea of Government involvement in the case. In particular, he referred to the publication by Soviet scholar Aleksandr S. Tager in 1933, *Tsarskaya Rossiya i delo Beilisa* (“Tsarist Russia and the Beilis Affair”), claiming that the idea of government action behind the identification of the murder in Kiev as a case of blood libel was not a response to the discussions in the national Duma over the possibility of abolishing the Pale of Settlement in February 1911. Tager, indeed, pointed out that the institution of a congress of nobles advocating the impossibility of extending equal rights to the Jewish citizens of the Empire facing the discussions in the Duma determined a reaction by the

¹⁶⁰ Weinberg, *The Blood Libel in Eastern Europe*, pp. 277-278.

¹⁶¹ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 176.

¹⁶² Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo, vo. IV*, p. 148.

government that decided to stress over the allegations of ritual purposes behind the homicide in Kiev. Rogger rejected the necessity of Stolypin's government to follow the needs and dictations of Russian nobility because of its strength in that period. Furthermore, according to the author, the Prime Minister was aware that the proposal of the abolition of the Pale had scarce chances to pass; consequently, there was no need to use the murder in Kiev to influence it.¹⁶³

According to Richard Wortman, however, the Beilis case saw the participation of the government for several reasons. The case also aroused the interest of tsar Nicholas II. Despite the lack of proofs of ritual purposes behind the murder, the decision of prosecuting Mendel Beilis was taken by local authorities with the support of the Minister of Justice Shcheglovitov. The prosecution was first pushed forward by nationalist movements in Kiev and at the Duma, in response to the discussion on the proposed abolition of the Pale and the elimination of restrictions imposed on Jewish citizens. In this sense, according to the author, the emperor did not share the approval on the necessity of extending equal rights to Jews. This depended on the archaic vision that characterized his reign, that saw the necessity of preserving Russia as an autocracy: the idea of a *Tsar Batyushka* that could maintain his bond with the peasantry could not be conciliated with the end of the restrictions imposed on Jews. In support to this argument, Wortman suggests that, while back in 1817 a decree of tsar Alexander I rejected the idea that ritual purposes could be contemplated among the reasons behind a criminal charge since they could not guarantee impartial investigations, Nicholas II considered this view as aligned with a Western juridical tradition that he considered to be "alien to the feelings of the Russian people".¹⁶⁴

The case, then, saw the interference of the government in the investigations since the beginning. It was under the pressure of nationalist and tsarist groups that even before indicating Mendel Beilis as the alleged criminal, the murder was considered as committed by a Jew.

It is significant to notice that the murder of Yushchinsky took place few months before Prime Minister Stolypin's assassination in Kiev on September 5th, 1911. The assassin of the Prime Minister was identified as Dmitry G. Bogrov, a Jewish citizen: the authorities feared

¹⁶³ Rogger, *The Beilis Case: Antisemitism and Politics in the Reign of Nicholas II*, in "Slavic Review", 1966, vol. 25, n. 4, pp. 615-618.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Wortman, *Russian Monarchy: Representation and Rule*, Brighton, Academic Studies Press, 2013, pp. 216-217.

the outbreak of pogroms and many Jews left the city. Some reports even suggest that right after the assassination, officials decided to keep the news secret for several hours trying to avoid the eruption of anti-Jewish violence. Even if efforts were taken to minimize the risks of large-scale pogroms, several interpellations at the Duma stressed on the Jewish origins of the murderer. Mystery behind the real intentions of Bogrov provoked the spreading of theories related to the idea of Jewish conspiracy behind the assassination, which also determined the reaction of the British embassy in St. Petersburg.¹⁶⁵

The Minister of Justice Shcheglovitov has often been considered as having a central role in the Beilis affair. According to Rogger, he and the Prime Minister were considered as political rivals: while Stolypin ought to the support of a moderate conservative wing, the Minister of Justice was more interested in obtaining the backing of far-right nationalist parties, and it was after September 1911 that government involvement in the case appeared more explicit: “What was true for Shcheglovitov’s colleagues was at least equally true for him: the right was noisy and it could be a terrible nuisance.”¹⁶⁶

Overall, Mendel Beilis was arrested and accused of committing the murder of Andrey Yushchinsky in 1911 for ritual purposes. There is evidence that the case saw government participation even before identifying the accused, and that the chiefs of investigation were incited to prosecute a Jew by the Ministry of Justice. The case had reached a political level right after the finding of the body of Andrey Yushchinsky, and this appeared more explicit following the assassination of Prime Minister Stolypin in September 1911. The Ministry of Justice, being more exposed to the pressure of far-right nationalist groups, played an active role in the case, and in January 1912 charges against Mendel Beilis were formalized.¹⁶⁷

The Prosecution of Mendel Beilis

The murder in Kiev and the rumors that identified it as a case of blood libel assumed a political connotation: the case saw the participation of members of the government, notably officials working for the Ministry of Justice including Minister Shcheglovitov too. The involvement of the tsar is not proved, even if Nicholas II himself did not deny the existence of ritual murders and was interested in the case.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Abraham Ascher, *P. A. Stolypin: The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 375-377.

¹⁶⁶ Rogger, *The Beilis Case*, p. 622.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁸ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, pp. 180-181.

Beilis was identified as the only possible murderer, since his family was the only one living in the vicinity of the place where the body was found. The aim of the prosecution was to prove both that Beilis was responsible for the crime and that the case presented undeniable signs of a ritual murder. For this reason, it was necessary to show that he was an assiduous observant of religious prescriptions, and that he was part of the Hasidic movement, which had also been identified since the beginning as the religious group to which the responsible of the homicide belonged.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, there was the need to prove not only that the body of Andrey Yushchinsky was wounded in order to collect his blood that would have then been used for ritual purposes, but also that ritual murders actually existed and had already happened in Russia.¹⁷⁰

In order to support its existence, the prosecution called to testify, among others, Ivan Sikorsky, an expert of modern psychiatry and professor at the Saint Vladimir University in Kiev, allegedly specialized in the recognition of the methods used by Jews in committing ritual murders. During the trial, he declared that the signs on the body clearly revealed the collection of blood for religious use.¹⁷¹ This confirms the analysis of Kieval: in the nineteenth century, the blood libel accusation had to be readapted the functioning of modern trials; therefore, the prosecution had to rely on alleged scientific evidence.¹⁷²

The prosecution, however, did not only call into question the testimony of scholars and scientific experts. Father Justin Prinaitis took also part to the trial: he was a Roman Catholic priest who back in 1890 published a pamphlet where he asserted that Judaism prescribed to kill non-Jews.¹⁷³ As it was previously mentioned, the myth of ritual murder committed by Jews was not originally rooted in the Russian Orthodox tradition, but it derived from the Western world and was then imported only after the annexation of part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the acquisition of the Jewish communities of the Pale. According to Lindemann, the testimony by Father Prinaitis was a sign of the weakness of the prosecution, as it could not find a member of the Orthodox church willing to take part to the trial, even though the two confessions shared a centuries-long anti-Judaic tradition.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Ivi, pp. 184-185.

¹⁷⁰ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 187.

¹⁷¹ Weinberg, "Connecting the Dots", p. 240.

¹⁷² Kieval, *The Rules of the Game*, p. 306.

¹⁷³ Weinberg, "Connecting the Dots", p. 241.

¹⁷⁴ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 187.

Overall, according to Harriet Murav, the basis of the prosecution against Mendel Beilis was structured with three main evidences: first, there was the need to prove “medically” that the murder was committed for ritual purposes, in such a way that could allow to collect blood. The second element on which the accuse relied were the findings of professor Sikorsky, i.e. the psychological and anthropological basis of the crime, described by the testimony as “the racial revenge and vendetta of the Sons of Jacob”. Then, the prosecution had to demonstrate, thanks to the deposition of Father Prinaitis, that Judaism prescribed the use of blood of Gentiles. In this sense, the trial can be described as formed by what the author calls “two competing legal performances”: the trial of Mendel Beilis himself, and the trial of Jews collectively as alleged perpetrators of ritual murders. In this last point the prosecution was successful.¹⁷⁵

Overall, The use of scientific and analytical argumentations in order to prove the existence of the blood libel, the case shows, as Weinberg asserts, how “the modern and pre-modern form of antisemitism coexisted in the early twentieth century.”¹⁷⁶ The modernity of antisemitism emerging from the case depends on the fact that the trial itself was used for political purposes, and this is showed by the rumors aroused by far-right and ultranationalist movements among which the Black Hundreds on the rituality of the murder right after the finding of the body and by government participation in the case. “Pre-modern antisemitism” is referred to religious prejudices on Jews that date back to the Middle Ages.¹⁷⁷ This last form of antisemitism emerging from the case can be related to what De Michelis calls Judeophobia, which remained the main component of Russian antisemitism, as it derives from mystery and esoterism that are associated to Judaism.¹⁷⁸

The Jury was composed by twelve members, among whom seven peasants.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, seven components were members of the Union of the Russian People. The judge, appointed directly by Shcheglovitov, decreed partial instructions for the length of the trial.¹⁸⁰ At the end, after two years of imprisonment, Mendel Beilis was found not guilty. However, as it was previously mentioned, the verdict confirmed the ritual character of the murder. As Weinberg

¹⁷⁵ Harriet Murav, *The Beilis Ritual Murder Trial and the Culture of Apocalypse*, in “Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature”, 2000, vol. 12, n. 2, p. 246.

¹⁷⁶ Weinberg, *Connecting the Dots*, p. 250.

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁸ De Michelis, *La giudeofobia in Russia*, p. 17

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁰ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 190.

underlines, the main task of the prosecution was reached: according to later declarations of lawyers who took part in the trial, in case of a denial of the identification of the case as a ritual murder, the counterpart would not have agreed.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Weinberg, *Connecting the Dots*, pp. 249-250.

CHAPTER 3

The Treatment of the Beilis Affair in the French Press

Est-ce que la magistrature philosémite de Russie vaut beaucoup mieux que la magistrature dreyfusarde de France ? Est-ce que, dans l'affaire du crime rituel de Kieff, le gouvernement monarchique de l'Autocrator de toutes les Russies est beaucoup plus reluisant que les gouvernements républicains de Moussou Loubet, de Moussou Fallières et autres dreyfusards de marque ?¹⁸²

According to Léon Poliakov, the blood libel was the question on which the tsarist regime conducted “the last great battle against Jews”, and the trial of Mendel Beilis in Kiev was the last relevant trial for ritual murder in the history of modern antisemitism.¹⁸³

Albert S. Lindemann analyzed the correlation between the Beilis trial and the Dreyfus Affair in France, showing how the case in Kiev reached a significance that went beyond the simple judicial controversy. While it is true that it could not have developed without the French antecedent and it did not see the same mass mobilization, on the other hand the impact it had on public opinion in Russia and abroad, and mostly the mobilization of Jewish and non-Jewish organizations allow “to speak of an affair that developed out of the Beilis case.”¹⁸⁴

The Dreyfus Affair certainly was a turning point in the history of the *Troisième République*: among the other consequences, it reshaped French politics polarizing the positions of right and left wings over the Jewish question. The Beilis Affair took place five years after this important episode in French history: it is thus relevant to see how it was discussed by the *dreyfusard* and *antidreyfusard* sides. Furthermore, its treatment in the French press shows how a case of blood libel can be read considering the features of modern antisemitism in France.

International Reactions to the Trial

The arrest of Beilis in 1911 provoked reactions by public opinion both domestically and abroad. In Russia, however, the indignation was limited only to the case itself, and protests did not reach a larger level than the aim to obtain the discharge of the accused. The case also saw the sympathy of ordinary people, with the collection of funds for the family of the accused to pay the trial. In 1913, journalist Vladimir Korolenko remarked the resonance that

¹⁸² *Le crime rituel de Kieff*, “France d’hier et France de demain”, October 21st, 1911.

¹⁸³ Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo*, pp. 147-154.

¹⁸⁴ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 175.

the case had reached, even arousing more attention than other controversial facts: the trial of Mendel Beilis went beyond the Jewish question, unveiling problems of corruption and lack of proofs in the Russian juridical system. The fact that the final verdict did not deny the alleged existence of ritual murders was interpreted as a victory for the antisemitic press.¹⁸⁵

At the international level, the Beilis Affair took on a political dimension also because it was presented by the opponents as an episode of the “Russian counter-revolution”, and as a part of attempts to disrupt the affirmation of liberal and revolutionary movements: anti-Jewish policies that still survived in the Empire and the systematic antisemitism that emerged from the prosecution were part of the accusations moved to the Russian government. The role played by Jews in Russian revolutionary movements was also underlined by the foreign press. At the end of the trial, indeed, the verdict was represented as a defeat for Russian authorities; conversely, as it was previously mentioned, the fact that the court did not deny that the case presented the signs of a ritual murder indicated the persistence of state-sponsored antisemitism.¹⁸⁶ International reactions to the trial and the concern that it aroused beyond Russian borders were not only limited to Jewish organizations. Demonstrations in favor of the accused took place all over Europe, and starting from 1912, declarations complaining the unequal prosecution were published in several countries: in Germany it was signed, among others, by Thomas Mann, while in Great Britain also by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. In the United States, an appeal to Nicholas II himself was signed by leaders of several Christian groups. A declaration was published in France too, even though it counted on a lower participation than the others, as the French right was hesitant in attacking the Russian ally.¹⁸⁷

Concern showed by international Jewish organizations had a remarkable impact on its resonance beyond Russian borders. Back in 1963 Zosa Szajkowski highlighted the fact that at the time of the Beilis case, the system of Jewish alliances on the international level was changing. The Paris-based *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, founded in 1860, at the turn of the century was losing its leading role, as the influence of German and British communities was growing. Moreover, the American Jewish community was starting to play an important role among the other national groups. Notably, also the Russian and Polish communities were more involved in this process of redefinition of international Jewish alliances. As it was

¹⁸⁵ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 183.

¹⁸⁶ Szajkowski, *The Impact of the Beilis Case on Central and Western Europe*, p. 213-215.

¹⁸⁷ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 184.

mentioned in the previous chapter, the outbreak of pogroms in 1881 provoked a reorganization of the community itself and the emergence of national sentiments. According to Szajkowski, indeed, Russian Jews abandoned a “passive” role internationally and started to participate to the system of Jewish alliances, bringing their specific tendencies, which at that time were alien to Western and Central European communities: the Beilis case and its notoriety among the public opinion internationally abroad played an important role in redefining the participation of Russian Jews at the international level.¹⁸⁸

While on the domestic level the imprisonment and prosecution of Mendel Beilis provoked reactions that were mainly related to problems in the judiciary rather than on the charge of ritual murder and the systematic antisemitism that the trial unveiled, the affair also aroused interest abroad: the International Jewish Labor Bund, through a declaration by its leader Bejnisch Michalewitch, reclaimed his reaction as the only strong position against the trial.¹⁸⁹ Lindemann, referring to the remarks by Szajkowski on the influence played by the Beilis case on Jewish communities abroad, asserts that concern shown for the case was moved not only by humanitarian interest. Its notoriety, indeed, went beyond protests over the unfair imprisonment of the accused, but it was also moved by political reasons. International protests saw a leading role played by German and Austro-Hungarian Jewish communities; the French community, on the other hand, was not involved as much as their Central European counterparts because, as the author underlines, “Beilis’s arrest offered enemies of tsarist Russia, and above all Jewish enemies, an irresistible opportunity to further discredit the already much discredited regime and in so doing to isolate Russia further from the world community and even, conceivably, to shake the Franco-Russian alliance.”¹⁹⁰

The Beilis Affair According to the *American Jewish Year Book*

As it was previously mentioned, the affair in Kiev took place at a time when the system of international Jewish alliances was changing: this process saw the growing importance of the Jewish community in the United States among others. In the light of these changes at that time, considering how the case was reported by two different Jewish international advocacy groups such as the American Jewish Committee and the Alliance Israélite Universelle is useful to understand the role they played in arousing concern for the case abroad.

¹⁸⁸ Szajkowski, *The Impact of the Beilis Case on Central and Western Europe*, p. 198.

¹⁸⁹ Ivi, p. 214.

¹⁹⁰ Lindemann, *The Jew Accused*, p. 179.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jewish community in the United States, due to the increasing immigration to North America, notably from Eastern Europe after the first wave of pogroms, was the third largest in the world, following those in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires. According to Michael N. Barnett, at that time American Jews were better organized and more concerned by the situation of Jews abroad. Efforts in this sense were fastened by pogroms in the Pale of Settlement, and these issues were brought up to the attention of the U.S. Presidency, whose geopolitical influence was increasing at that time. As Barnett underlines, anti-Jewish violence also increased the interest of leaders of the community in a better organization, and in 1906 the American Jewish Committee was founded. Protecting Jews abroad was the main objective of the organization along with the domestic community's welfare.¹⁹¹

The American Jewish Committee played an important role in bringing the situation in Russia to the attention of the U.S. Administration: according to Poliakov, the withdrawal from the commercial Treaty of Navigation and Commerce between the United States and the Russian Empire can be related to the indignation aroused by the case of ritual murder in Kiev.¹⁹² This political move was initially opposed by the U.S. State Department: while the correlation between the two facts is not certain, efforts taken by the Committee and other Jewish organizations to appeal to Congress facilitated the withdrawal from the 1832 treaty.¹⁹³

In the same year of its foundation in 1906, the American Jewish Committee took over the *American Jewish Year Book*, a publication founded in 1899 with the aim of recording events involving Jews domestically and abroad. As in the case of the Committee, this publication was created in the context of the growing influence of the American Community in the system of relations among Jews internationally.¹⁹⁴

In 1914, one year after the end of the trial, the *Year Book* issued a report on the principal facts of the affair claiming the active involvement of the state: according to this document, rumors pointing the killing of Yuschinsky as a case of ritual murder started to circulate right after the finding of the body, indicating the upcoming Passover as the reason behind the alleged use

¹⁹¹ Michael N. Barnett, *The Star and the Stripes: A History of the Foreign Policies of American Jews*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 73-78.

¹⁹² Poliakov, *Storia dell'antisemitismo*, vol. IV, p. 149.

¹⁹³ Barnett, *The Star and the Stripes*, p. 80.

¹⁹⁴ Jonathan D. Sarna, Jonathan J. Golden, *The Twentieth Century Through American Jewish Eyes: A History of the American Jewish Year Book*, in "The American Jewish Year Book", 2000, vol. 100, pp. 3-5.

of the blood of a Gentile child. The report underlines the involvement of the ultra-nationalist group *Chërnyaya Sotnya* (“Black Hundreds”) in spreading rumors on the evidence of the signs of a ritual murder committed by a Hasidic group.¹⁹⁵ The Black Hundreds were an ultranationalist paramilitary formation with an antisemitic rhetoric that saw Jews as the embodiment of socioeconomic instability, using ritual murder accusations and encouraging violence.¹⁹⁶

Then, the report underlines that rumors on the existence of evident signs of a ritual murder on the body were then taken up by newspapers such as *Russkoe Znamya* (the same publication that issued the first edition of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* back in 1903), *Kolokol* and *Novoe Vremya*. The alleged ritual purposes of the murder also joined the political sphere, as reactionary parties demanded an inquiry of the Government over the existence of ritual murders at the national Duma. Such interpellation was rejected, but it was nevertheless significant, especially because it followed discussions over the introduction of a bill that abolished the Pale of Settlement.¹⁹⁷ This is possibly a reference to the demand by the Union of the Russian People at the National Duma for a Government inquiry on the case in Kiev.¹⁹⁸ The Year Book asserts a link between this parliamentary intervention and the political debate for the abolition of the Pale.

Denunciations of the political involvement in the case by the Year Book were not limited to the question of blood libel brought up to the parliamentary level: according to the report, indeed, the local department, under the pressure of the Black Hundreds, decided to put in charge of the investigations M. N. Krasovsky, the former chief of the police in Kiev. The case already had aroused the interest of the tsar, and it was also for this reason that Krasovsky finally accepted. The chief of the investigation identified a house located near the cave where the body of Andrey Yuschinsky was found as the place where the murder took place. Then, according to the report, “When Krasovsky informed the Department of Justice that he had at least found the murderers and submitted his evidence, he was told: «That is all very well, but why don’t you find a Jew? Find a Jew!»”¹⁹⁹ Facing the pressure by the Department of Justice, Krasovsky refused to obey to these instructions and was forced to resign. Finally, on

¹⁹⁵ *The Beilis Affair*, in “The American Jewish Year Book”, 1914, 16, pp. 21-24.

¹⁹⁶ Bemporad, *Empowerment, Defiance, and Demise*, p. 344.

¹⁹⁷ *The Beilis Affair*, in “The American Jewish Year Book”, p. 24.

¹⁹⁸ Poliakov, *Storia dell’antisemitismo, vol. IV*, p. 148.

¹⁹⁹ *The Beilis Affair*, in “The American Jewish Year Book”, pp. 25-26.

July 22nd, the Head of the Political Police Department, Colonel Kulyabko, entered in the house of Mendel Beilis, who was arrested with the accuse of committing the murder, despite the lack of proofs.²⁰⁰

According to the *American Jewish Year Book* report, the case did not see the interference of the Ministry of Justice alone, but it took a higher level: tsar Nicholas II was informed by the Minister of Justice Shchlegovitov that the homicide of Yushchinsky was a case of ritual murder right in the occasion of the visit to Kiev in September 1911, when Prime Minister Stolypin was murdered.

The Czar became deeply interested, and made continual inquiries as to its progress, and was assured by the Minister of Justice that Mendel Beilis was the murderer. Both the Czar and his minister beheld in the conviction of a Jew on a charge of ritual murder an unusual opportunity for justifying their anti-Jewish policy before the World.²⁰¹

Shcheglovitov, then, would have interfered in the prosecution of Mendel Beilis “as to please the Csar.”²⁰² It was in response to the Emperor’s interest, indeed, that the Ministry of Justice would have influenced the choice of professors and scientific authorities that could find proofs of a ritual murder in examining the body of Yushchinsky.²⁰³

Beyond that, the narration of the trial is based on the idea that it was structured on two levels, i.e. the charges against Beilis and the attempt to prove the assassination of Andrey Yushchinsky as a case of ritual murder. What follows is a daily narration of how the case was discussed in front of the Court with details on testimonies and proofs. The narration of the verdict is perhaps the most remarkable point of the report: while there is no mention to the fact that it let the question of the ritual nature of the murder open, the *American Jewish Year Book* asserted that the peasants in the jury discharged Beilis of any accusation despite “threats and intimidations.”²⁰⁴

Another feature of the general system reflected by the trial was the complete absorption of the Court and the Administration by political considerations. From the point of view of justice,

²⁰⁰ Ibidem.

²⁰¹ Ivi, p. 32.

²⁰² Ivi, p. 33.

²⁰³ Ibidem.

²⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 37-57.

which consists in discovering and punishing offenders, the Russian Court had never before exhibited so striking a fiasco.²⁰⁵

Analyzing this report allows to understand how the case was interpreted by the Jewish community internationally, in the light of the growing importance of the American community in this context. It resumes a position of open denunciation of the Russian government as involved in the trial and of the situation of Jews in the Empire overall.

The Case Reported by the Alliance Israélite Universelle

The Paris-based Alliance Israélite Universelle was founded in 1860 with the aimed at uniting the Jewish communities internationally and give support for those struggling for emancipation in those countries where they lived with limited civil rights. Since then, this organization covered an important role in the system of international Jewish activities. As it was previously mentioned, however, at the time of the Beilis Affair it had lost its prominent role. This was due to the growing influence of other foreign leading communities and organizations, among which the American Jewish Committee.²⁰⁶

At the time of the case, the Alliance issued a year report, the *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, collecting the main updates of the living conditions of Jews in foreign countries and the main facts concerning them. The 1913 annual bulletin included a detail report of the case in Kiev. Similarly to the *American Jewish Year Book*, it stresses on the responsibility of nationalist and antisemitic groups in spreading rumors on the ritual purposes of the murder right after the finding of the body back in 1911. Then these allegations reached the high rank of the central government and the judiciary, accused of influencing the case since the beginning. Even before arresting Beilis, the authorities pushed the police to accuse a Jew. As in the *American Jewish Year Book* report, the *Bulletin* underlines that the dismissal of Krasovsky from the position of head of the investigations was due to this fact. What follows is a detailed narration of the trial including all the main testimonies: this report is aimed at showing the “tendentious spirit” of the whole case: the aim of Russian judiciary was to renew the myth of blood libel providing it with a “new authority”.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Ivi, p. 60.

²⁰⁶ Szajkowski, *The Impact of the Beilis Case on Central and Western Europe*, p.198.

²⁰⁷ *Israélites de Russie. Fausses accusations : l'affaire Beilis, a Kief*, in “Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle”, 1913, n. 38, p. 20.

The document then highlights the composition of the jury as an element that could have influenced the final verdict and, contrary to the report of the *American Jewish Year Book*, it underlines that the final decision, even if it acquitted Beilis, did not deny the allegations of the ritual purposes of the murder: this was mainly due to the way in which questions were posed to the jury.²⁰⁸

Remarkably, the report includes considerations on the international reactions to the trial. In France, a protest organized by the Ligue française des droits de l'homme et du citoyen took place on October 17th, with the participation of the Socialist Party and in the presence of the leader Jean Jaurès. It is the only action of protest taken in France that is listed by the Alliance Israélite Universelle, along with an open declaration by the Chief Rabbi of the French community and a letter of Louis Duchesne to the other members of the Académie française.²⁰⁹

Remarks on the positions of protest in France against the trial of Beilis tend to confirm the analysis of Szajkowski on the reactions of European public opinion to the case: in France many voices of the public debate were neutral due to the Franco-Russian Entente. The only openly critical position against the Russian government came from the Socialist side.²¹⁰

French Press after the Dreyfus Affair

The Dreyfus Affair constituted a turning point in the history of modern antisemitism. The debate around it involved the European public opinion overall, beyond the French borders. According to Francesco Germinario, the judicial affair involving a French military official determined the complete evolution of centuries-long anti-Judaism into “mature antisemitism”: even though the final verdict was a defeat for the *antidreyfusard* side of the debate around the Affair, it nevertheless determined its victory from a cultural point of view, since antisemitism officially became a political choice.²¹¹

In France, the Dreyfus Affair also reshaped the relation between left-wing movements and antisemitism. In France the notion of race was rejected by the republican ideology: the idea of alterity of the Jew, deriving from the catholic tradition, survived up until the First World War, mostly in the nationalist political discourse; it was adopted and readapted by the extreme

²⁰⁸ Ivi, p.42.

²⁰⁹ Ibidem.

²¹⁰ Szajkowski, *The Impact of the Beilis Case on Central and Western Europe*, p. 211.

²¹¹ Francesco Germinario, *Costruire la razza nemica: la formazione dell'immaginario antisemita tra la fine dell'Ottocento e gli inizi del Novecento*, Torino, Utet, 2010, pp. XVII-XVIII.

right, notably by movements such as the *Ligue de la patrie française* and *L'Action française*. On the other hand, as regards to the left, “economic” antisemitism survived after 1906, but it lost its evidence after the solution of the case. It did not completely disappear from the ideology of parties that belonged to the socialist area that in fact in those years was changing, with a radicalization of the revolutionary area. Being financially exploited by Jewish bankers was part of the accusations that this area held against the reformists.²¹²

According to Nancy L. Green, the Dreyfus Affair was not the only factor that determined a change in the attitude of the French left to antisemitism: the migration of Jews from the Russian Empire westward from the years 1980s in coincidence with the outbreak of pogroms also involved France. The settlement of these migrants from Eastern Europe reshaped the “socio-economic profile of the Jews”, determining the discovery of a “Jewish proletariat”: the affair determined a polarization of the French left to the *dreyfusard* side, but this shift was more due to the adherence to the republican values than to the defense of a bourgeois Jew.²¹³

The trial for ritual murder in Kiev took place five years after the Dreyfus Affair. It had a wide resonance all over Europe and it was also reported by the French press. Analyzing the narration of the facts over the two years of the trial shows how the case was represented by the *dreyfusard* and *antidreyfusard* sides of the public opinion and how the distance between right and left wings and their approach towards antisemitism were polarized. The French narration of the Beilis Affair is also peculiar in the sense that France was a republic that embodied the liberal values resulting from the constant changes that verified throughout the nineteenth century, while, on the other hand, Imperial Russia right before the outbreak of the Great War still represented a rigid autocratic system where, among other differences with France, the Jewish question had been following a completely different path.

Beyond those differences, the Entente with Russia was a key factor in French foreign policies. As Szajkowski noticed, the resonance of the Beilis Affair all over Europe found a different situation in France, whose position at the international level influenced the way in which the Beilis Affair was portrayed. The European press overall tended to consider it as part of the reactionary attitude of the central authorities and as an example of the attempts of the tsarist government to jeopardize liberal and revolutionary movements through anti-

²¹² Dreyfus, *L'antisémitisme à gauche*, pp. 99-102.

²¹³ Nancy L. Green, *Socialist Antisemitism, Defense of a Bourgeois Jew and Discovery of the Jewish Proletariat: Changing Attitudes of French Socialists before 1914*, in “International Review of Social History, 1985, vol. 30, n. 3, pp. 375-376.

Jewish actions. In France this reproving attitude towards the Russian authorities was moderate; this fact was mainly related to the international position of France: openly defending Beilis would have meant attacking Russia, and so the Franco-Russian Entente. While the Franco-Jewish press considered the case as allowing “to take the pulse of French anti-Semitism”, few publications took an openly critical approach towards the tsarist authorities despite the international position of France, namely left-wing newspapers.²¹⁴

The trial of Mendel Beilis took place in the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair, which, as it was previously illustrated, reshaped French politics and public opinion before the Great War in such a way that antisemitism was rejected by those movements that adhered to the values of the Republic. The Jewish question thus became fundamental in re-delineating French political movements at the beginning of the century. For this reason, the criterion identifying the newspaper and magazine articles analyzed is their political affiliation. Therefore, it is useful to consider how the French political opinion was structured and which movements determined the political panorama, along with their representative press.

The Beilis Affair had an antecedent in the French press regarding the alleged ritual nature of the crime. As it was previously mentioned, the Damascus affair in 1840 had an important role in the history of nineteenth century antisemitism as it revived the myth of blood libel, that was rooted in a centuries-long catholic anti-Judaic tradition. The victim of the murder, the Capuchin monk Father Thomas was a French citizen, and thus the case saw the intervention of the French consul in Damascus. Beyond that, the importance of the case is given by the fact that it readapted the accusations of ritual murder to the features of modern antisemitism: according to Julie Kalman, “for many newspapers, the question of whether Jews still committed ritual killings was as burning as that of France’s role as power in the region.”²¹⁵ Kalman analyzed the way in which four French newspapers addressed the case in Damascus, remarking their impartiality. In some instances, the plausibility of this crime in the geographical area where it took place was given by the fact that Jews living in Damascus were not as emancipated as those living in France. In other publications, the prosecution could count on the conservative French Catholic tradition that believed that the religious prescription of this crime could be found in the Talmud.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Szajkowski, *The Impact of the Beilis Case on Central and Western Europe*, pp. 211-213.

²¹⁵ Julie Kalman, *Rethinking Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century France*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 102.

²¹⁶ Ivi, pp. 103-106.

As it happened during the Damascus Affair, the different living conditions of Jews and their lack of emancipation in the Pale are also called into question by *Le Temps* when discussing the alleged ritual nature of the murder in Kiev:

Les israélites en Pologne et dans les gouvernements russes limitrophes, ainsi qu'en Galicie (Pologne autrichienne), forment toujours un peuple à part qui a gardé ses coutumes ancestrales, le culte et les rites de ses pères et un costume traditionnel. [...] Cet homme d'extérieur, l'effroi ou la risée des gamins, évité par le chrétien, surveillé sans bienveillance par des autorités soupçonneuse, est réputé avoir des sentiments d'un autre âge, des superstitions et des pratiques secrètes.²¹⁷

Le Temps was a moderate conservative newspaper founded in 1861. It is among those publications whose neutrality is underlined by Szajkowski when referring to the coverage that the Beilis Affair had in France. This attitude was mainly due to the Entente with Russia at that time.²¹⁸ This is confirmed by the news on the end of the trial published on October 12th: the article reports the questions posed to the jury and the verdict provided; then, reactions in Kiev and St. Petersburg are briefly discussed. The report then emphasizes the composition of the jury, whose members were mostly peasants. It finally underlines the impartiality of those jurors facing political influences over the case. With this last remark, the newspaper alludes to an instrumentalization of the trial by both sides, thus maintaining a neutral point of view.²¹⁹

Far-Right Press and “the Ritual Murder in Kiev”

L'Action française is a far-right nationalist and monarchist political movement founded in 1899. At the time of the case it relied on an affiliated and homonymous daily newspaper, founded in 1908. Openly antisemitic and strongly anchored to its anti-republican values, this movement, thanks to the commitment of its leading member Charles Maurras, was “one of the most influential schools of thought at that time”.²²⁰

The Jewish question represented a central point for the political propaganda of the organization, which was rooted in the historical context of the Dreyfus Affair. The openly antisemitic ideology declared in the 1899 manifesto that was published at the foundation of

²¹⁷ Charles Rivet, *Un grand procès russe : l'affaire Youstchinsky*, “Le Temps”, October 10th, 1913.

²¹⁸ Szajkowski, *The Impact of the Beilis Case on Central and Western Europe*, p. 210.

²¹⁹ *Le procès Youstchinsky*, “Le Temps”, November 12th, 1913.

²²⁰ Lurent Joly, *Les débuts de l'Action française (1899-1914) ou l'élaboration d'un nationalisme antisémite*, in “Revue Historique”, 2006, vol. 308, n. 3, p. 695.

the movement was not undermined by the solution of the case in 1906, two years before the creation of the newspaper. Maurras, influenced by the ideas of Édouard Drumont, one of the main voices of French antisemitism, considered the Jewish question as having a popular and subversive potential for the cause of nationalism. According to Laurent Joly, his antisemitic stances responded to both personal beliefs and to political strategy. Thus, the solution of the Dreyfus Affair in 1906 marked a turning point for both French socialist movements that rejected antisemitism and for nationalist groups, among which, notably, *L'Action française*. This popularly based nationalist movement concentrated its efforts in the enduring *antidreyfusard* cause: the affaire represented the “Achilles’ heel” of the *République*, and its vulnerability consisted in the “Anti-French maneuvers” played by the Jewish financial élites.²²¹

As it was analyzed in the previous chapter, according to Michele Battini, during the decade preceding the outbreak of the First World War, social antisemitism, which was consistently rejected by the French left, became more strictly connected to corporativism. *L'Action française* played a fundamental role in this process. At the core of Maurras’ literary production there was a constant denunciation of the decadence of modern society. This decadence directly derived from the advent of mass democracy and the economic individualism and competition. For Maurras, the Dreyfus Affair constituted a turning point in this process of decadence, marking a war between the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen resulting from the Revolution and the principles of national unity.²²²

Maurras’ antisemitism was not only a product of the corporativist ideology proclaimed by *L'Action française*. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* functioned as a paradigm for the myth of a Jewish world conspiracy. Their publication at the beginning of the nineteenth century consolidated the denunciation of financial monopoly by an alleged Jewish capitalistic élite. On the other hand, conspiracy theories went beyond the mere economic capitalism: the idea of Jewish and masonic plot behind the 1789 Revolution was a consistent part of the accusations that antisemitic authors as Maurras moved to the *juiverie*.²²³

Therefore, *L'Action Française* had an important role in the definition of modern antisemitism at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The representation of the trial of Mendel Beilis

²²¹ Ivi, pp. 697-703.

²²² Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, pp. 95-97.

²²³ Ivi, p. 64-65.

in Kiev was influenced by the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy, a corollary to the movement's corporatist ideology that was influenced by the publication of the *Protocols* and the Dreyfus Affair.

Nous n'avons pas coutume de parler de « meurtre rituel ». Non pas qu'un trait de mœurs attesté de tant de côtés ne mérite pas un crédit sérieux, mais parce que notre antisémitisme politique, pratique a besoin de se fonder sur des faits immédiats, immédiatement vérifiables et que les cas de meurtre sont rarement accomplis à la portée de notre vérification personnelle.²²⁴

These are the opening lines of the article published on the homonymous daily newspaper affiliated to *L'Action française* on May 12th, 1911, announcing the finding of the body of Andrey Yushchinsky in Kiev and the first allegations indicating the killing as a ritual murder committed by Jews. These introductory lines to the news from Kiev take for granted the existence of the blood libel; on the other hand, the article stresses its marginal role in the antisemitic ideology which played a central role in the movement: accusation against Jews must be based on “immediate and verifiable facts”. This point demonstrates how the myth of the use of blood for ritual purposes by Jews was a marginal element of modern antisemitism emerging from the history of nineteenth-century Europe. Being part of the Western European Catholic tradition of anti-Judaism, it could not be anything but an accessory for the far-right nationalist propaganda which was mainly focused on what is called social and economic antisemitism.

The *antidreyfusard* cause perpetrated by the far-right organization could not rely anymore on mystical and religious-related element. After this first statement, however, the article presents the murder in Kiev as an undeniable case of ritual murder, reporting the testimony of an “excellent Russian functionary in St. Petersburg” addressed to *Journal des débats*, another publication. At that time, Mendel Beilis had not been accused for the crime yet, although the report highlights all the elements that could allegedly demonstrate the religious characteristics of the homicide, stressing on the presence of Jews near the place where the corpse was found and the coincidence of the case with the period of Passover. It also goes further in indicating the Hasidic movement as responsible among all the other sects “pullulating” in that area of the Empire.²²⁵

²²⁴ *Un meurtre rituel chez les Juifs de Russie*, “L'Action française”, May 12th, 1911.

²²⁵ Ibidem.

It is not until August 20th of that same year that *L'Action Française* reported updates of the news about the case in Kiev. On that number, an article with the title *Une Affaire Dreyfus en Russie* (“A Dreyfus Affair in Russia”) appeared on the first page.²²⁶ It was clear already in 1911, even before the trial, that the case would have had a great impact on public opinion both in Russia and abroad, at the point that the *antidreyfusard* newspaper in that same year recalled the French antecedent when narrating details of the investigation in Ukraine. Gilbert Maire, the author of this article, since the first lines compares the case with the Dreyfus Affair: the most evident similarity lies in the efforts of Russian Jews in obstructing researches over the assassination of Andrey Yushchinsky. Attempts of Russian Jews in driving the investigations away from the hypothesis of a ritual murder went further, as the author asserts that they tried to “buy” press coverage and even members of the police involved in the case:

On parle souvent, en France, des massacres de juifs en Russie, on essaie presque toujours d'en expliquer les causes. Des faits semblables à l'affaire Youtchinski sont précieux à qui veut constater la puissance universelle de l'or sémite.²²⁷

The first article on the case since the beginning underlined the superstitious and mystical component of the blood libel accusation, claiming that it could not serve the cause of antisemitism, a pillar of the movement's ideology. It is clear in this case that the coverage given to the news did not rely on the accusation of ritual murder alone: the focus is on the attempts of “Russian Jewry” in influencing the investigations. The attention is moved to the myth of Jewish conspiracy.

The arrest of Mendel Beilis was finally reported on the issue of May 7th, 1912. In this case, news regarding the case in Kiev are part of an article on the first page regarding Zionism overall and “Jewish solidarity” in the Dreyfus and Beilis affairs. One year after the first accusations of ritual murder, the article claims that the Jewish population in the Empire, fearing violent consequences, invoked the help of the exponents of the French community in order to get the attention of members of the diplomatic corps. The link with Zionism relies on the fact that it was the international congress, according to the article, that tried to call for the intervention of wealthier exponents of the community in order to get diplomatic

²²⁶ Gilbert Maire, *Une Affaire Dreyfus en Russie*, “L'Action Française”, August 20th, 1911.

²²⁷ Ibidem.

attention over the case. This assertion by the article is considered once more as the most important aspect of the affair in Kiev, beyond the charge of ritual murder itself.²²⁸

News on the case in Kiev are more frequent in the year 1913, at the time of the trial, which took place in October. Updates from Kiev are cited from a report by the *Havas* Agency, and while in the previous article on the case the theme of ritual murder was overlooked in favor of the elements that could possibly reveal Jewish influence on the investigations, in this case *L'Action Française* focuses on the declaration published on the daily newspaper *Le Temps*, signed by the Chief Rabbi of France Alfred Lévy. This declaration, along with others published all over Europe at the time of the case, denied any charge of ritual murder and the religious prescription of the use of blood by the Talmud.²²⁹ In doing so, the attention is moved from the myth of Jewish conspiracy influencing the investigations to the alleged existence of ritual murder. Beyond that, however, the news on the Beilis Affair are preceded by a comment on the first page by Charles Maurras, one of the ideologues of the movement:

Nous ne sommes ni pour ni contre la théorie du crime rituel, nous ne savons pas ce que c'est : mais nous connaissons la défense juive, nous l'avons vue à l'œuvre pour le traître Dreyfus : nous nous en méfions parce qu'elle est intéressée et parce qu'elle est juive.²³⁰

The Dreyfus Affair is once more called into question: while the blood libel is considered by Maurras as a theory, in line with the narration of the case in 1911, the focus of the indignation are the actions allegedly taken by Jews beyond Russian borders to sensitize public opinion. Maurras claims that news on the trial, even those published by *Havas* Agency, were not reliable, denouncing alleged efforts in falsifying reports from abroad with unreliable translations. Overall, the attention is shifted from the case itself to the interest it aroused abroad and the circulation of news about it. This is seen as a product of a Jewish plot aimed at raising the awareness of public opinion and influencing the trial.²³¹ The mobilization of Jewish communities in Russia and abroad would be aimed at “transforming” the case in a second Dreyfus Affair.²³² The idea of Jewish influence on newspapers was not new: similar claims could be found in the public opinion debate on the Damascus Affair back in 1840.²³³

²²⁸ *Querelle d'Hébreux. À propos de Sionisme : de Joseph à Arthur Meier. Un crime rituel ; la solidarité juive (Dreyfus et Beilis)*, “L'Action Française”, May 7th, 1912.

²²⁹ *Le crime rituel de Kiev*, “L'Action française”, October 11th, 1913.

²³⁰ Charles Maurras, *La fraude juive*, “L'Action française”, October 11th, 1913.

²³¹ *Ibidem*.

²³² *Le crime de Kiev et la nation juive : une seconde Affaire Dreyfus*, “L'Action française”, October 17th, 1913.

²³³ Kalman, *Rethinking Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century France*, p. 111.

The end of the trial and the verdict discharging Mendel Beilis, indeed, were portrayed by *L'Action française* as the clear result of concerted Jewish efforts in influencing the trial using financial power and press manipulation:

Ce procès aura eu pour effet de mettre surtout en relief la puissance de la presse juive, si non de l'or juif en Russie, ce qui est équivalent.²³⁴

Overall, the coverage of the case of ritual murder in Kiev by *L'Action française* is in line with the openly antisemitic ideology of the homonymous movement. The myth of blood libel, even if not denied, is on the background of a wider narration that mainly focuses on the theme of Jewish conspiracy. Since the first article on the Affair, indeed, the ritual nature of the murder is assumed, but at the same time it is considered as a secondary aspect that cannot serve the antisemitic cause of the nationalist ideology. It is worth noticing how the Dreyfus Affair is often called into question, and similarities between the two cases are underlined. While the two trials concerned two different charges, what makes them comparable is the active role that the *juiverie* allegedly played in influencing them. The use of financial power is at the core of these actions in raising awareness of public opinion. Therefore, the way in which the case in Kiev was covered was mainly aimed at showing elements of conspiracy behind it. The mainly anti-Judaic nature of the accusation of ritual murder could not serve the cause of antisemitism as part of the movement's ideology. This is mainly related to the myth of a Jewish world conspiracy and to the economic aspect of modern antisemitism.

France d'hier et France de demain was an anti-masonic far-right and openly antisemitic magazine published between 1910 and 1911. It was active over a period of only two years, and the affair in Kiev could be covered only at the beginning. It was two years before the trial, but the assassination had already been identified as a case of ritual murder. News on the investigations were assiduously reported by this weekly publication with letters from a correspondent in Russia and extracts of articles taken from Russian newspapers, namely *Novoe Vremya* and *Russkoe Znamya*. The assassination of Prime Minister Stolypin in Kiev in September 1911 encouraged the circulation of conspiracy theories connecting the two cases: according to rumors spreading at that time, the killing would have been organized by the *Kahal* of Kiev because of the interest of the victim in deepening the investigations over Yushchinsky's death. According to the newspaper, this was not the only reason behind

²³⁴ Jacques de Merlis, *À propos du crime de Kief*, "L'Action française", October 16th, 1913.

Stolypin's murder: the Jewish press would be interested in replacing him with the Minister of Finance in order to protect the "Jewish international capital".²³⁵

The correspondence of *France d'hier et France de demain* from Russia was quite regular, and allegations over the two cases were often interconnected. For example, on October 14th, a letter by the correspondent in the Empire on the financing of a monument dedicated to Prime Minister Stolypin was published underlying the decision to accept any financing by the Jewish community taken by the committee for the realization of the memorial. Rumors indicated the influence of Jews even behind this decision:

Quelle joie, si la décision prise à l'unanimité par le Comité de Kief a été dictée par le même mouvement the noble dédain ! Mais quelle déception, si cette décision se trouvait tout bonnement inspirée par les Juifs eux-mêmes qui renâclent devant une contribution destinée à glorifier leur ennemi assassiné par un de leurs ! N'oublions pas qu'ils sont déjà fortement mis à contribution pour dégager leur complicité dans cet assassinat politique et aussi pour étouffer l'affaire du crime rituel de Kieff, deux forfaits qui pourraient bien être liés l'un à l'autre.²³⁶

Overall, *France d'hier et France de demain* re-proposes the antisemitic theories that saw attempts and conspiracies taken by the local Jewish community in order to influence the conduct of investigations. The element that allows a distinction with the nationalist daily newspaper *L'Action française* is the link between the alleged ritual murder of Yushchinsky and the assassination of Prime Minister Stolypin in Kiev in September of that same year. As it was previously mentioned, the killer was a Russian Jew, and this led to the spread of accusations of a Jewish conspiracy behind that. The idea presented by the weekly magazine, that it is also possible to find in the previously analyzed daily newspaper is that of attempts taken by the "universal Jewry" in influencing the coverage of the case by the press abroad to its favor:

Il faut s'attendre à ce que la Juiverie universelle exerce des efforts surhumains pour empêcher la vérité d'éclater. Il en fut déjà ainsi pour le crime rituel de Damas et de tant d'autres crimes identiques, même après les aveux des coupables. Il en sera toujours de même, car le Juif sectaire sait que la question du crime rituel est grosse d'orages terriblement menaçants pour lui.²³⁷

²³⁵ *L'assassinat de Stolypine et le crime rituel de Kieff*, "France d'hier et France de demain", September 10th, 1911.

²³⁶ *Lettre de Russie*, "France d'hier et France de demain", October 14th, 1911.

²³⁷ *Le crime rituel de Kieff*, "France d'hier et France de demain", December 30th, 1911.

Again, it is possible to notice how the Damascus Affair in 1840 was called into question as an antecedent not only for the blood libel, but also for the alleged Jewish influence on the press in order to manipulate its narration.

Jean Jaurès and the Jewish Question: The Beilis Affair Reported by *L'Humanité*

L'Humanité is a left-wing daily newspaper founded in 1904 by Jean Jaurès, leader of the *Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière* (SFIO, “French Section of the Workers’ International”), precursor the French Socialist Party. This newspaper was mainly affiliated to the SFIO between its foundation and 1920, when the Communist Party became the only organ controlling the publication. It was edited by Jaurès until his assassination in 1914, one year after the solution of the Beilis Affair.²³⁸

As it was previously mentioned, the Dreyfus Affair constituted a turning point in the history of French left-wing movements, as it determined the rejection of antisemitic stances by the larger part of its basis in adherence to the values of the Republic. The idea of a Jewish financial élite controlling the economic system only survived in the radical side. Initially a moderate republican, Jaurès moved to the SFIO 1892, before becoming its leader in 1902. He thus constituted a key figure in the process of reconfiguration of the French left during the Affair. Initially, Jaurès was not in line with the *dreyfusard* side: supporting the guilt of the accused, he claimed that Dreyfus could be discharged thanks to his bourgeois origins; beyond that, in 1894 he denounced the “deployment of Jewish power” to save the officer from the trial.²³⁹

In 1898 Jaurès moved to the opposite side of the debate over the affair. One of the reasons behind this change is the influential role played by the writer Émile Zola and to the proofs of the innocence of Alfred Dreyfus. In that same year, writing about the “Jewish race”, he denounced the mechanism of capitalist exploitation embodied by Jews, not the “race” itself. Jaurès’ antisemitism was then in line with the socialist ideology at that time. The move to the *dreyfusard* side in 1898 was not shared by all the exponents of the French left. In that same year, Jaurès became one of the redactors of *La petite République*, and this determined a change of the position of the editorial line of the newspaper.²⁴⁰ Here, Jaurès published the “Proves” of

²³⁸ Claire Sécail-Traques, *L'Humanité, de Jaurès à nos jours*, in “Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire”, 2004, 84, pp. 182-183.

²³⁹ Éric Vinson, Sophie Viguiet-Vinson, *Jaurès le prophète : mystique et politique d'un combattant républicain*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2014, p. 231.

²⁴⁰ Dreyfus, *L'antisémitisme à gauche*, pp. 81-83.

the innocence of Dreyfus. According to Éric Vinson and Sophie Viguer-Vinson, this publication determined a radicalization of the political position of the socialist exponent on the case. This radicalization depended on the fact that the aim of the Proves was not only to defend the accused, but also to link the socialist fight with a “universal and humanistic aim”: the innocence of Dreyfus transcended his military position and his bourgeois origins. This position was coherent to the process of realignment of the French left in the *dreyfusard* side in the name of the republican values. This episode was fundamental in the reconfiguration of this political side at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁴¹ Thus, Jean Jaurès had a fundamental role in the polarization of right and left in France and in delineating the new borders of modern antisemitism in the years preceding the Beilis affair.

Jaurès’ initial ideological position over the Jewish question and its move during the years 1890s was not unusual at that time. Antisemitic manifestations inside working parties and movements are coherent to what Battini defines “anti-Jewish anti-capitalism”: the Socialist movement officially rejected any antisemitic stances only at the end of the twentieth century, notably during the International Socialist Labor Congress of Brussels in 1891.²⁴² During the nineteenth century, economical antisemitic stances were progressively absorbed by the Socialist ideology: Battini recognized the roots of this phenomenon in the work of Alphonse Toussenel, particularly in the book *Les juifs, rois de l’époque*. Attacks to the liberal system in favor of a new socialist order constituted the background of the denunciations of the alleged economic role of the Jewish financial élite.²⁴³

At the time of the trial in Kiev, *L’Humanité* was facing accusations of being financed by Jews. These allegations generally came from other areas of the left and were mainly provoked by articles published on more radical publications such as *La guerre sociale* and *La vie ouvrière* back in 1909. This fact remarks the ongoing presence of antisemitism in its economic stances in the revolutionary area of the French left in the years following the Dreyfus Affair, also because of the increasing political distance between the SFIO and the more radical General Confederation of Labour (CGT, *Confédération Générale du Travail*). These accusations found resonance in the right-wing and in the nationalist press, namely in *L’Action française* in 1912.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Vinson, Viguer-Vinson, *Jaurès le prophète*, pp. 234-239.

²⁴² Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, pp. XII-XIII.

²⁴³ Ivi, pp. 41-43.

²⁴⁴ Dreyfus, *L’antisémitisme à gauche*, pp. 117-123.

It was in this context that the trial in Kiev was reported in *L'Humanité*. The case was covered one year after the finding of the body of Yushchinsky, and it saw the interest of the newspaper for what concerns the trial in 1913, in some occasions with comments by Jaurès personally. The trial was described in detail with a constant coverage and a critical approach that went beyond the area of the SFIO, for instance with the publication of a letter in favor of Beilis by the CGT itself.²⁴⁵

Back in 1912, the affair was first defined by an article as an “antisemitic monstrosity”: the accusation of ritual murder is described as a tool used by the Black Hundreds and other nationalist and antisemitic Russian organizations to incite the peasantry against the Jewish population in the Pale of Settlement. Initially, the alleged strategical purposes of the Russian government are not mentioned, as it was in other circumstances, for instance in the case of the 1914 *American Jewish Year Book* report²⁴⁶. These lines introduce a declaration in defense of Beilis signed by 118 French scholars. This letter finally states that the myth of blood libel cannot find place in a “civilized country”: the religious prescription of the use of blood by Judaism is denied and it is defined as a tool used in the past to discriminate religious minorities.²⁴⁷

This is the first stance of *L'Humanité* in 1912 over the case. News on the affair are more frequent in the last months of 1913, at the time of the trial. Unlike the previously analyzed report, the accusations of an instrumental use of the case by the tsarist authorities are put forward in this case:

Sous prétexte de « crime rituel », le gouvernement tsarien et sa magistrature servile ont dressé, depuis deux ans, une machine de guerre contre les forces progressives de la Russie.²⁴⁸

The Beilis affair and the accusation of ritual murder overall is seen as a tool used by the central government, and not only by far-right movements, to incite the population against the Jewish minority in order to maintain the reactionary vision embodied by the tsarist autocracy. The judicial case in question is considered as the culmination of a series of reactionary actions that saw anti-Jewish resentment as a way to maintain the status quo. Beyond that, in the same article the case is defined as a more “ignominious” and “roughly

²⁴⁵ Confédération générale du travail, *Pour Beilis*, “L'Humanité”, October 17th, 1913.

²⁴⁶ American Jewish Committee, *The Beilis Affair*, p. 23.

²⁴⁷ *Le prétendu crime rituel : une monstruosité antisémite*, “L'Humanité”, April 6th, 1912.

²⁴⁸ B. Veillard, *Le “crime rituel” est un crime politique et judiciaire du tsarisme*, “L'Humanité”, October 10th, 1913.

planned” version of the Dreyfus Affair: this depends on the religious and superstitious aspects of the blood libel.²⁴⁹ On the same issue, a report of the opening of the trial and of the first interrogation of Beilis is published along with news on the outbreak of labor and students protests in several cities of the Empire.²⁵⁰

In a comment on the following issue, Jean Jaurès insists on the political use of the case by the authorities, claiming that, back at the time of the 1905 Revolution, the central government instigated the local population against Jews. The instrumentalization of Judeophobia shows the weakness of Russian autocracy facing the process of modernization:

Est-ce pour refouler ce mouvement que le tsarisme tente de déchaîner contre les juifs des passions aveugles et sauvages, comme au jours où il les rendait responsables du mouvement révolutionnaire ? [...] Cette intrigue multiple de la contre-révolution russe atteste son désarroi grandissant et son inquiétude.²⁵¹

The opinion of the director of *L'Humanité* precedes an article that accuses the foreign press for its “complete silence” before the start of the trial; this happened despite the protests of the intelligentsia and the proletariat of the Empire that could escape censorship. This consideration accompanies a letter signed by prominent exponents of Russian society that would have been cited by Beilis’ defense along with other appeals from abroad.²⁵²

L'Humanité thus considered the Beilis affair as a trial concerning the Jewish population overall, and not only the accused. While the ritual murder accusation was described as an instrument used by the government in order to maintain a “counter-revolutionary” and reactionary order, the newspaper also stressed on the actions taken by the Black Hundreds and other far-right organizations both locally and outside the Pale of Settlement in provoking the possible outbreak of a new wave of pogroms.²⁵³ It also stressed on the role played by popular reaction to the case, especially by workers and students protests against the prosecution of Beilis:

Jaurès s’exalte. Il exprime l’espoir que la réaction violente de Russie et la réaction diffuse qui en est chez-nous la répercussion seront vaincues par l’effort du socialisme grandissant.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁹ Ibidem.

²⁵⁰ *Le procès de Kief suscite des protestations ouvrières*, “L’Humanité”, October 10th, 1913.

²⁵¹ Jean Jaurès, *L’agitation en Russie*, “L’Humanité”, October 11th, 1913.

²⁵² *Autour du procès de Kiev: une protestation de l’élite russe*, “L’Humanité”, October 11th, 1913.

²⁵³ *En cas d’acquiescement de Beilis les Bandes noires menacent de “pogrome” en règle*, “L’Humanité”, October 14th, 1913.

²⁵⁴ *La répercussion du procès Beilis*, L’Humanité, October 18th, 1913.

Reporting the verdict that finally discharged Mendel Beilis on November 11th, *L'Humanité* underlines the composition of the jury, which, as it was previously mentioned, counted seven peasants among its twelve members. While the fact that the ritual nature of the murder was not denied by the final decision is not mentioned, the verdict is announced as a demonstration of the decadence of the tsarist authorities and its counter-revolutionary vision.²⁵⁵ The role played by the composition of the jury is also emphasized by the comment of Jean Jaurès on the end of the trial on the following day:

C'est cette affirmation morale du peuple russe qui est le grand fait du procès. C'est comme un admirable trésor qui est mis au jour et qui révèle les richesses profondes et cachées de la terre russe. Quand viendra l'heure où ces forces nobles et saines exerceront sur toute la politique de la Russie une action efficace ?²⁵⁶

The political leader insists in asserting the interference of the government in the case and underlines the “natural honesty” of the peasants’ conscience that could resist the pressure of the authorities.²⁵⁷

Jean Jaurès thus considered the final verdict as a signal of the weakness of the tsarist autocracy in Russia. This was remarked by the presence of peasants in the jury, while the fact that the alleged ritual purposes of the murder were not denied by the final decision is not mentioned. Overall, the narration of the Beilis trial by *L'Humanité* is in line with the ideology of the socialist area in France and its consideration of the Jewish question at that time. The Dreyfus Affair is mentioned when reporting the trial in Kiev as in the case of *L'Action française*, and this shows the dimensions of the debate that it aroused in public opinion in Europe and in France too, despite its international interests. Furthermore, the accusation of ritual murder is described as an aspect that provided the case in Kiev with a “monstrous” aspect that the French affair did not have. Since the beginning of the case, the newspaper considered the blood libel allegations as unacceptable in a civilized country and as a factor revealing the instrumentalization of the case. While at first only a far-right organization such as the Black Hundreds is accused to use the murder to incite the local population of the Pale against the Jewish population, during the trial in 1913 *L'Humanité* denounces the tsarist government of being involved. This put the editorial line of the newspaper in contrast with

²⁵⁵ B. Veillard, *Beilis est acquitté : le jury paysan contre le tsar*, “*L'Humanité*”, November 11th, 1913.

²⁵⁶ Jean Jaurès, *Peuple russe*, *L'Humanité*, November 12th, 1913.

²⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

the more neutral tone that the French press assumed during the case in relation to the international position of France and the Entente with Russia. The newspaper, indeed, considers the blood libel accusation reaching the judiciary and its use as revealing the weakness of the system that still ruled the Empire: it is an episode of the Russian “counter-revolution”. For this reason, local student and worker protests during the trial are emphasized along with the narration of the affair itself.

The Beilis Affair Narrated by *Les Temps Nouveaux*

Les Temps Nouveaux was an anarchist weekly publication founded in Paris in 1895. The interest aroused by the trial in Kiev during the first weeks of November led the magazine to publish a report by an “Israelite student”. The use of the term *israélite* can be interpreted in line with the position of the Proudhonian socialist writer and ideologue Auguste Chirac. As in the works of Drumont and Toussenel, indeed, the terms *juiverie* and *juif* were used by Chirac to denounce the antisocial and “parasitic” role of Jews and, by extension, of any “republican and democratic capitalist”. Conversely, the word *israélite* only defined any person of Judaic faith.²⁵⁸

Le rejet des témoignages en faveur de Beilis, les proclamations antisémites répandues à profusion, l'action incessante des Cent-Noirs, la conférence de Zamprowsky sur les meurtres rituels, faite pendant l'instruction, dans le but de fortifier l'accusation, tout cela atteste péremptoirement cette vérité : le procès Beilis est le commencement d'une nouvelle croisade contre les Israélites russes, qui forment l'avant-garde de la Révolution.²⁵⁹

While the use of the term *israélites* in the light of Chirac’s work is remarkable, the detailed analysis of the trial in Kiev published on *Les Temps Nouveaux* describes the affair as part of a political machination taken by a “counter-revolutionary” government. Such point of view can be compared to the position of *L’Humanité*: any accusation moved towards Mendel Beilis is considered as instrumental, as the accused was the only Jew living in the area where Yushchinsky’s body was found. A new element is added to the denunciation of the political use of the trial that was part of the interpretation of the case by the left-wing press overall, and it is the important role played by Jews in Russian revolutionary movements.

The position of *Les Temps Nouveaux* reporting the case is not always comparable to that of *L’Humanité*. While Jean Jaurès considered positively the composition of the jury, the “Israelite

²⁵⁸ Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, p. 53.

²⁵⁹ Un étudiant israélite, *L’Affaire Beilis*, “*Les Temps Nouveaux*”, November 1st, 1913.

student” remarked the exclusion of the only “intellectual” among the other members, a physician. This decision is denounced as a move taken by the prosecutor in charge of the case in order to get a verdict pronounced by “ignorant peasants full of prejudices.”²⁶⁰

Another remarkable fact is the use of the term “race” when referring to the “Israelite people” when referring to the history of the myth of blood libel, which is considered as a typical accusation generally moved to the Jewish people overall beyond the mere accuse:

Si nous jetons un regard dans le passé, si nous feuilletons l'histoire, nous verrons que, pour exciter les haines populaires contre les juifs, les implacables ennemis de cette race maudite ont saisi toutes les occasions propices, n'ont reculé devant aucune infamie.²⁶¹

According to Battini, while antisemitism was rejected by labor and socialist movements during the last decade of the nineteenth century, condemned by German ideologue August Bebel as “socialism of fools”, the notion of Jews as a race still survived in line with the “Darwinian language” used by those political movements at that time.²⁶²

Mass-Circulation Press and the Trial in Kiev

The intransigent position taken by left-wing political publications such as *L'Humanité* and *Les Temps Nouveaux* over the affair was not unnoticed. Commenting the acquittance of Beilis the day after the verdict, *Le Petit Parisien* remarked:

La presse progressiste et libérale sans restriction accueille avec enthousiasme l'acquittement de Beilis. Elle est unanime à proclamer que « la Russie a su éviter le grand opprobre qui menaçait le Pays. »²⁶³

Le Petit Parisien was founded in 1876. Initially conceived as a predominantly political newspaper, since the first years its initial purposes changed in favor of a wider coverage that comprised news stories. By the year 1918, it was one of the main publications in France, and one of the most important newspapers worldwide for its divulgation.²⁶⁴ Consequently, the narration of the Beilis Affair in mainstream newspapers was different, with a lack of political connotation. Considering the example taken from the article on the trial, indeed, it is possible to notice that while the attitude of the “liberal and “progressive press is defined as

²⁶⁰ Un étudiant israélite, *L’Affaire Beilis*, “Les Temps Nouveaux”, November 8th, 1913.

²⁶¹ Ibidem.

²⁶² Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, p. XIII.

²⁶³ *Beilis en liberté*, “Le Petit Parisien”, November 12th, 1913.

²⁶⁴ Jacques Wolff, *Entrepreneurs et firmes : Jean Dupuy et Le Petit Parisien de 1879 à 1920*, in “Revue d’économie”, 1971, vol. 81, n. 6, pp. 1032-1035.

“enthusiast”, *Le Petit Parisien* does not take a specific position.²⁶⁵ This can be related to the previously mentioned overall neutrality towards the case adopted by the moderate press in France because of the alliance with Russia. Moreover, another key factor was the complexity of mass information in France in those years. The blood libel affair in Kiev, indeed, took place during a period when the French press was evolving; since the years 1880s, the main daily newspapers ceased to be politically affiliated and became more committed to mass divulgation. *Le Petit Parisien* was indeed among the main four publications read by three quarters of the audience. Christian Delporte analyzed the transformation of mass information at the turn of the nineteenth century: public lectures became less frequent, and the commercial strategy of the main daily newspapers was more aimed at selling single issues rather than subscriptions. Before 1914, the differences between the upper classes and a greater public in the access to information diminished, and political affiliation ceased to be a factor defining mainstream newspapers. The author, indeed, noticed how *L’Action française* and *L’Humanité*, despite their opposite political positions, had more similarities in common than each of them had with popular newspapers such as *Le Petit Parisien*: some contemporaries, indeed, distinguished two categories of publications: “press of information” and “doctrinal press”. At the eve of mass information, the space dedicated to news stories increased: according to Delporte, this is showed by the increasing importance given to reports of investigations and trials, that previously interested specialized publications dedicated to the judiciary. In those years, the interest in crime stories increased at the point that even political newspapers started to include a space dedicated to it.²⁶⁶

All these factors determined a difference between politically affiliated and mass-circulation newspapers for what concerns the narration of the Beilis Affair. Considering *Le Petit Parisien*, indeed, the case was mainly reported during the months of October and November 1913, at the time when the trial took place and more than two years after the finding of the body and the first allegations of blood libel.

Le procès dit du meurtre rituel qui a amené la comparution en cour d’assise de l’israélite Beilis, cause une sensation grandissante. Le même mystère continue à envelopper cette affaire ténébreuse.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ *Beilis en liberté*, “Le Petit Parisien”, November 12th, 1913.

²⁶⁶ Christian Delporte, *Presse et culture de masse en France (1880-1914)* in “Revue Historique”, 1998, vol. 299, n. 1, pp. 93-104.

²⁶⁷ *Le procès de Kiev révèle des détails horribles*, “Le Petit Parisien”, October 10th, 1913.

These are the opening lines dedicated to the beginning of trial at the first page of *Le Petit Parisien* on October 10th. The case is already defined as an *affaire*, even though there is no mention to the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, as in the previously analyzed political newspapers. While on the previous issue, news on the case were reported in a few lines on the third page²⁶⁸, the increasing rumors that it aroused on public opinion (*sensation grandissante*) changed its treatment by this publication. On the following issue, indeed, the trial is reported stressing on the “horrible details” emerging from the investigations on the murder. Here, the alleged ritual purpose of the killing is not emphasized, while the final lines are dedicated to a letter of protest signed by 700 European rabbis sent to the court in Kiev. Remarking this fact, however, *Le Petit Parisien* does not take any political position.²⁶⁹ The same treatment of the opening of the trial in Kiev can be found on another mass-circulation daily newspaper, *Le Petit Journal*, which reports depositions and testimonies in front of the court while briefly mentioning the religious purposes of the murder and the petition sent to the court.²⁷⁰ While the proceeding of the trial is narrated in detail stressing on the factual aspects of the crime, the news of the acquittance, is briefly mentioned on November 11th, reporting a dispatch of the *Havas* agency and without any highlight on the verdict or the composition of the jury.²⁷¹

Considering the space given to the trial in Kiev by mass-circulation newspapers such as *Le Petit Parisien* and *Le Petit Journal* it is possible to remark how the process of popularization of daily publications determined a change in the editorial line with a larger space dedicated to news stories: remarks on the political dimension of the case are briefly discussed, without any reference to the Dreyfus Affair as in the case of political newspapers. The narration of the trial itself with highlights on the details of the murder are privileged over any consideration on the blood libel accusation against a Jew.

The Case Narrated by *La Croix*

According to Delporte, the process of mass divulgation and the increasing importance of chronicle facts also involved *La Croix*, a Catholic magazine founded in 1880 and converted into a daily newspaper in 1883.²⁷² While this fact implies a narration of the factual aspects of

²⁶⁸ *Le procès de Kief*, “Le Petit Parisien”, October 9th, 1913.

²⁶⁹ *Le procès de Kief révèle des détails horribles*, “Le Petit Parisien”, October 10th, 1913.

²⁷⁰ *Accusé, en Russie, d'un meurtre rituel*, “Le Petit Journal”, October 10th, 1913.

²⁷¹ *Le procès de Kief*, “Le Petit Journal”, November 11th, 1913.

²⁷² Delporte, *Presse et culture de masse en France (1880-1914)*, p. 104.

the murder and the trial, the myth of blood libel aroused more interest than in the other newspapers:

Ce crime, ayant les caractères du meurtre rituel tel qu'il est présenté par la tradition historique, occasionna dans toute la ville une émotion considérable. L'opinion accusa immédiatement les juifs, qui sont très nombreux à Kief. L'influence des juifs dans la ville s'employa à faire disparaître tous les documents qui pouvaient servir à la divulgation de la vérité. Les indicateurs de la police sur l'indépendance desquels on comptait furent mis à la retraite ou déplacé. On terrorisa la population pour arrêter les témoignages.²⁷³

Reporting the news of the beginning of the trial on the same day as *Le Petit Parisien* and *Le Petit Journal*, the murder is described as presenting clear signs of a “traditional” rituality: the existence blood libel is considered as an historical fact. In an article published on the issue of May 12th, 1912, the assassination of Yushchinsky is described as perpetrated by “a sect of perverse Jews, depository of horrible crimes.”²⁷⁴

The treatment of the ritual murder accusation by *La Croix* can be interpreted in the light of Nina Valbousquet's analysis of the relation between the catholic tradition and modern antisemitism. Rather than the Torah, indeed, the Talmud was stigmatized by the anti-Judaic tradition as an element alien to Christian belief. Starting from the eighteenth century, this fact converged with modern and secularized antisemitism: Talmudic prescriptions were represented as a product of Jewish nationalism aimed at subjecting the Gentile population. In this context, the myth of blood libel in its modern reemergence was not a part of theological anti-Judaism, but it nevertheless marked a transition towards what Valbousquet considers the “catholic antisemitism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”²⁷⁵

Beyond that, *La Croix* sheds light on the efforts allegedly taken by Jews in influencing the investigations by hiding documents that could prove the guilt of Beilis. The blood libel accusation is accompanied by modern antisemitic allegations that present signs of Jewish conspiracy in influencing the case. This last element also characterizes the last remarks on the letter of protest signed by representatives of the European Jewish communities:

²⁷³ *Le crime rituel de Kief*, “La Croix”, October 10th, 1913.

²⁷⁴ Ibidem.

²⁷⁵ Valbousquet, *Tradition catholique et matrice de l'antisémitisme à l'époque contemporaine*, p. 68.

Les experts sont très partagés sur la question de savoir si l'on se trouve ou non en présence d'un crime rituel, mais, depuis l'arrestation de Beilis, les juifs se sont efforcés de susciter par toute l'Europe un mouvement favorable à l'accusé, dont Israël a épousé la cause.²⁷⁶

Moreover, the article on the verdict on the November 12th issue accuses the international Jewish organizations of influencing the narration of the trial in the foreign press. Such remarks can be compared to Maurras' position on the case in *L'Action française*.²⁷⁷ According to *La Croix*, indeed, the Jewish press abroad portrayed the jury as a "group of savages". While the article considers the final decision taken by the jury as letting the allegations of ritual murder opened for the "anti-Semites" (*chez les antisémites*), it nevertheless denounces the efforts taken by Jews in Kiev to distort the testimonies in front of the court. This last element, according to *La Croix*, influenced the treatment of the deposition of Father Prinaitis, the Roman Catholic priest called to witness the religious nature of the case.²⁷⁸

An article published in 1912 had already denounced Jewish efforts in raising awareness of the public opinion in an attempt to influence the conduct of the trial with the circulation of letters of protest. According to *La Croix*, this fact is comparable to what happened during the Dreyfus Affair:

Nous nous souvenons trop de la manière dont les juifs s'entendaient à créer des mouvements d'opinion à l'époque de l'Affaire Dreyfus pour croire que de grands personnages d'Angleterre aillent exercer une pression sur la justice russe à l'occasion d'un juif qu'ils ne connaissent pas.²⁷⁹

Reference to the Dreyfus Affair for the efforts allegedly taken by Jews to influence public opinion are remarkable not only because they are in line with nationalist positions such as that of *L'Action française*. As Battini underlines, indeed, the role played by publications such as *La Civiltà Cattolica* in Italy and *La Croix* in France was not marginal in the catholic area, but rather influential even for the ecclesiastic hierarchy. Before the case in Kiev, the French catholic newspaper had been on the *antidreyfusard* side during the affair, which had confirmed the traditional anti-Judaic hostility to Jewish emancipation, and the catholic primacy in the battle against the Illuminist values rejecting the "modern errors."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷⁷ Charles Maurras, *La fraude juive*, "L'Action française", October 11th, 1913.

²⁷⁸ *Le procès de Kief*, "La Croix", November 12th, 1913.

²⁷⁹ *L'assassinat du petit chrétien de Kief*, "La Croix", May 21st, 1912.

²⁸⁰ Battini, *Il socialismo degli imbecilli*, pp. 17-22.

CONCLUSION

The myth of ritual murder was originally rooted in a centuries-long Catholic tradition. Episodes of blood libel accusations in the history of Imperial Russia can be found only after the acquisition of Polish-Lithuanian territories at the end of the nineteenth century. At that time, this myth was reemerging all over Europe, notably after the controversial Damascus Affair in 1840. Back then, the legend of the use of blood for ritual purposes by Jews was revived and readapted as an element of modern antisemitism, which is a product of the history of nineteenth-century Europe. Russia was not immune to the socio-economic changes at that time: antisemitism in the Empire and the outbreak of pogroms derived from those factors, even if the religious Judeophobic component was more relevant than in other national contexts.

The Beilis Affair thus allows a contextualization of antisemitism in prerevolutionary Russia in a European perspective. While at that time the myth of blood libel played a marginal role in the antisemitic ideology in France, in Russia religious symbology was more relevant. Nevertheless, the accusation itself was instrumentalized by the antisemitic propaganda of nationalist movements, and it saw the involvement of members of the central government.

It was in this context that the Beilis Affair could take place at the beginning of the twentieth century. The prosecution collected scientific and medical evidences that could allegedly prove the ritual nature of the murder of Andrey Yushchinsky. Proofs of the religious prescription of the use of blood in Judaism also had to be shown to the court. The elements on which the prosecution relied and the conduct of the trial itself show how the myth of blood libel was reconfigured during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the case had wide resonance abroad because of the controversy of such allegations in a modern trial and the light that it shed on antisemitism in Russia and the conditions of Jews living in the Pale of Settlement.

For all these reasons, the case became an Affair discussed by the public opinion. Articles on French newspapers at that time approached it with the Dreyfus Affair. The proportions of the case in Kiev cannot in fact be compared to the trial of the officer in France that determined, among other the consequences, the affirmation of antisemitism as a political choice along with the polarization of right and left wings over the Jewish question.

The position of France at the international level and its Entente with Russia also influenced the treatment of the Beilis Affair in the French press. The coverage of the trial in moderate publications overall did not contemplate open accusations to the Russian government. In the case of mass-circulation newspapers as *Le Petit Parisien*, the political relevance of the case is scarcely mentioned: articles focused on the details of the murder and on the trial itself rather than on the *affaire*. While this neutral and ambivalent position was certainly related to the interests of the Franco-Russian Alliance, it also shows how the rise of mass-circulation press determined a lack of political affiliation along with the increasing importance of news stories and reports of investigations and trials.

Conversely, the press affiliated to the socialist area such as *L'Humanité* explicitly denounced the involvement of the authorities in the case, which was presented as a sign of the weakness of the autocratic status quo in the Empire. The final verdict that discharged Beilis given by a jury mostly composed by peasants was described as proving the failure of Russian “counter-revolution”. This position is also interesting because it shows the reconfiguration of French socialism towards the Jewish question with the Dreyfus affair: the Judeophobic accusation of ritual murder itself was defined by Jean Jaurès as an instrument of the government to preserve a reactionary order.

On the other hand, the far right and nationalist newspaper *L'Action française* claimed that the coverage of the affair abroad was a sign of its instrumentalization by an alleged Jewish financial élite. The trial was indeed indicated as a proof of the existence of a Jewish conspiracy that acted internationally. While the authenticity of the alleged ritual purposes of the murder is not denied, it is nevertheless defined as marginal in the case, as it could not be considered among the “verifiable” facts on which the openly antisemitic ideology of the movement was based. Many of the allegations of the nationalist press were shared by the catholic newspaper *La Croix*, whose treatment of the ritual murder accusation ultimately shows how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, this myth was not part anymore of a catholic anti-Judaic tradition, but it was ascribable to a broader context.

Finally, the importance of Jewish world conspiracy theories in the narration of the case shows the influence of a fundamental document published almost ten years before, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which were also based on elements deriving from the Russian context.

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